Here we have in simple lambent prose with at times a touch of lyrical afflatus the story of the transformation of a political soldier into a political *sadhu* who comprehends and understands the processes and pitfalls the glory and tears the pathos and humour of patriotism It is a social chronicle of charm It is at once a testament of faith and a re affirmation of that larger understanding which is the basis of true patriotism For, patriotism as Edith Cavell said may not be enough

There is no purple lining or velvet lacing

Mr Rao gives us unforgettable pictures of the peace and conflict and slogans and despair of those days

It is all typical of the dilemmas and pains and crisis of suffering But there is no wailing or grunting from the author There is not the least trace of cynicism It is all accepted experience

WHAT IT COST ME

(LEAVES FROM A DIARY)

VADIGENAHALLI
ASWATHANARAYANA RAO

FOREWORD
Dr B PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA

INTRODUCTION
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FOREWORD

Here is an interesting narrative of what may be regarded as the typical sufferings and sorrows of one engaged in the National Struggle for the emancipation of the Motherland. The style is half dramatic in character; it is suggestive and creates expectation in the reader's mind. The story contains no exaggeration whatever. If at all, it errs on the side of under-stating the case. Many a youth has made heavy sacrifices for the cause that he holds dearer to himself than his college or career, performs the national duties assigned to him, answers the call of the country and at the end of it all finds himself beggared, unemployed and helpless. Help comes from nowhere. There is the old mother who is left in distress. The younger brother is turned adrift and the uncle dies a premature death. The employers have given notice to quit. Life looks a tragedy. If it is not its sequel remains yet to be revealed.

Masulipatam,
10-2-1941.

B. PATTABHI SITARAMAYYA.

INTRODUCTION

I have enjoyed reading this little classic immensely And all this wonderful experience cost me nothing but a few hours of reading, thrilling reading which made me confess to the 'crime' of consigning all thrillers to flames.

"WHAT IT COST ME" is the work of an artist. The artist, like the poet of Shelley's conception, learns in suffering what he teaches in song. Like the little shrub that covers itself with thorns straining itself to gather all its drops of blood into a full-blown rose, he hoards his experience like a miser and then scatters it like a prodigal. To have an infinite zest for experience is in itself remarkable. But to be able to condense all of it into an image of human awareness is indeed an achievement.

I have no doubt but that, in its own time, "WHAT IT COST ME" will come to be regarded as a little classic of the period to which it belongs and the glory and agony of which it depicts—the Salt Campaign and the non-violent agitation of 1930 Many minds were made or marred then and many bodies bruised and broken. Brave hearts withstood the dire suffering of the flesh and of the spirit and beat eagerly for the redemption of the motherland. When the big wave of enthusiasm was whipped into foam and the high tide subsided, there were some who

emerged unscathed like the high rocks of ocean and others of whom nothing was left but spars and splinters But there were also a few for whom this high tide was a chastening experience No price is too great for the awakening of the Spirit Mr Aswath Narayan Rao paid his price like the rest And he has used his dear bought experience for the enrichment of his own mind as well as that of his fellow countrymen

WHAT IT COST ME is an echo of the distant mutterings of the great movement which thundered down like an avalanche on the enemy and almost by its own momentum once the word was passed by the Man of the Hour Nor is this its only distinction —the fact that it is the diary of a volunteer and a C Class prisoner speaking for the whole army of the unknown who suffered in the fight and not the autobiography of a Gandhi or a Nehru the leaders whose titanic sufferings are of a different kind It shows that the writer is not so much artist as 'crystal vase You can see the thought cloud and take shape'

We feel in it the delicate awareness of a dreamer who has given his all to his ideal and yet has no illusions about victory the equability of a Utopian who can discuss the plans for immediate SWARAJ in all earnestness with impracticable romantics and yet know full well that only danger is imminent the wisdom of a young man who can smile through his tears and can blend pathos and humour and the tragedy and comedy of life into a mood of unconditional and blissful acceptance, the lyricism

of a poet who can love the ocean as a symbol of the Infinite and yet be rationalist enough to see through the impostors masquerading as **Sadhus**, the passionate conviction of the **Satyagrahi** who swears by non-violence and yet recognises every day the absurdities to which it is exposed, and the fastidiousness of a gourmand who knows that **Kanji** is no substitute for Coffee or **Thikki** and **Pikki** for **Badam Halva** and yet puts up cheerfully with these inflictions though it means for him a prolonged and critical illness.

The entries in the Journal are made in clear and simple English; English that breaks off into peals of humorous laughter, blossoms into song or warms into dignified eloquence as the occasion requires. **Ease** and **Transparency** mark the writing at every step.

'WHAT IT COST ME' is a book which young men will surely love and the old understand.

Willingdon College,
Sangli.
21-5-1940.

V. K. GOKAK.

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a defence. At best, it is a modest exposition of the part played by a common 'soldier' in the non-violent struggle now in progress in India and attempts to set down the experiences of a generation of young men, who, even though they may have failed in their attempt to free their country, appear to have stumbled on the threshold of an entirely different, but more tangible type of freedom.

WHAT IT COST ME

CHAPTER I

LOOKING ON

IT is a day of days. The whole atmosphere is surcharged with a feeling of subdued awe, breathless expectancy and tense suspense. In spite of yourself, you are led back into the dim past.

There is a touching scene before you: a great and noble prince has spurned the sceptre and crown and is going out as an exile to keep his father's word.

Another majestic spectacle! A young and handsome prince again! How gracefully he bestrides the royal steed! He has given up all the good things of the world and is ready to ride away into the loneliness of the night in the quest of Truth!

And the sublimest vision of all! The Prince of Peace offering his precious life-blood at the altar of humanity that the children of man may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven!

And now, who is this frail figure of a man, marching forward before us in the flesh,

staff in hand, the load of years on his back, and grim determination portrayed on his features? Whither is the pilgrim bound with his band of brave soldiers clad in white? Wherefore these multitudes who flock around him and alongside the path and pay him unbounded homage and regard, notwithstanding his sack-cloth and ashes?

Look at the ladies painting the auspicious mark on his forehead, the shower of flowers that come pouring in on every hand, the touching of his sanctified feet by one and all, and the chanting of hymns and benedictions by the priests!

This is indeed a sight for the Gods! And all this to happen in this dark age, the age of "Kali"?

II

Place —The pial of a shop in far off K , a snug little town in the lovely district of S K

Date —The twelfth of March in the year of Grace Nineteen hundred and thirty

"Raghupathi Raghava Rajaram
Patita Pavana Seetaram"

These soul-stirring strains wake me up from my slumber In the dim and silent dawn, I open my eyes, sit upright on the bed and see to my

joy and wonderment, a group of men, women and children going past in solemn procession. The Keertan party has evidently been celebrating the Great March in this far off corner of the country, and with what religious fervour!

Presently the notes of music fade in the distance and I bestir myself to get ready for my journey to M...., the next place on my itinerary. The car is gliding along in the cool and pleasant morning breeze. The lotuses in the tank close by have just bloomed in charming array. Look there on yonder hill-top! Ah! The serenity and grace radiating from the face of Gomataraya? Oh, no! A change has come over him to-day. Yesterday evening when I had his darshan he was a picture of peace and tranquillity. But now, there is a look of wild joy about him. Does he expect something big to happen? Does he sense the beginnings of a great war? Perhaps.

III

Here I am at M...., a west-coast town. Everyone is talking of the inaugural march.

"Yes. The march has begun. But was the leader arrested as soon as he started or was he permitted to proceed in peace? What about the faithful followers? Was there any message from

the front ? The news reaches us only to morrow and how to rest in peace till then ? Was there any breaking of heads ? Were there any arrests or none at all ? How did the country at large respond to the call ? "

This is the kind of talk that you hear on all hands and there is no definite report from the front all through the day and all through the night The next morning comes as usual, the noon, the afternoon, and the evening, and anxiety and speculation gather in volume till the previous day's paper reaches our hands at last

IV

Here is Mr. S lying on his cot—hungering for news He was involved in a car accident yesterday while touring up-country doing propaganda His venerable mother is attending on him Report has it that the family was very prosperous ten years ago But the noble son turned his back on all comfort and luxury when the call came to him during the first campaign With unstinted generosity he opened his long purse to all and sundry. Result—the family is penniless to-day. But what of that ?

This great son of the family on his sick bed, is eager to know what is afoot and to join the

fray as soon as he can. The noble mother by his side is equally anxious for the news, though concerned about her son's health. And now look at the expectant gaze of the children who are all attention!

Is it not a privilege to read out to these pious folk the most exciting record of a war of righteousness as glorious as any that ever was launched within the memory of man? How peacefully and solemnly has the clarion announcing the war been sounded and how our great leader has been marching on—never hasting, never resting—and how at even-tide he halts at a roadside village, camping for the night in a mango grove? He is discoursing to the villagers on sanitation and hygiene! He is speaking to them about their sacred duty to the motherland on this great occasion.

V

Day after day passes and you hear no news as yet of the gnashing of teeth or the smashing of heads, though, apparently, the fight has begun in right earnest. We hear only of the slow, silent and solemn progress of our beloved leader towards the sea-shore and the whole party plodding along with him. There is no obstacle of any kind to

this determined band of pilgrim fighters—not a hair on their head is harmed

VI

Back home They are having a feast in our house to day A large number of friends and relations have been invited

Two of my friends propose to leave for the front on the morrow But their parents demur

"My boy is still young and raw How can he be of any use? Let him finish at least his college course," says the father apologetically

"That is not much of an excuse," puts in another friend "Look at the European war, for example! Doctors and lawyers, young men and old, and students from college as well as teachers joined as one man to serve their country at the hour of trial And why should any exception be made with regard to us? Moreover, ours is a non violent fight, where the chances of losing one's life are remote And any one who joins the fight is sure to return home with honour"

This appears to have a soothing effect on the parents who nod their heads in assent at last, though reluctantly

I just turn round and notice that my mother has been following the conversation keenly

* * * *

Next morning. There is a big gathering at the Railway Station. A batch of volunteers—forty strong—are leaving to-day. My two friends are among them. So I go there to bid them god-speed. The party is led by a big man of our town. He is standing there at the carriage door—the centre of all attention. A number of garlands adorn his neck and set off his beaming countenance and condescending smiles. One of the ladies present reads out a short address wishing the party success. The leader thanks us all in a brief speech. Everyone is having a farewell talk with his friend about to depart. So it is all bustle and excitement on the platform and a whole carriage is filled with these recruits. The train steams off and we all return with a feeling of triumph, the shouts and slogans still ringing in our ears.

Someone is hailing me from behind. I turn round and see a gentleman of my acquaintance. He asks me looking at my homespun clothes. "I say, are these really handmade?"

"Yes, cent per cent."

"All of us can put on these clothes with pleasure, if we can get such nice stuff."

And to my astonishment, this intellectual of fastidious tastes and of staid and even diehard

views has already jumped into a pair of home made pyjamas and a simple white cap covers his head!

I say to myself "This is perhaps only a passing enthusiasm Wish it denoted a lasting change of heart'

VII

To day a great leader has been arrested So we observe Hartal All the shops are closed All the conveyances stop plying Not so, the offices and schools The boys, however, take the law into their own hands The youngsters of one school move out *en masse* They march on to another institution Some faces here peep out through the window The rebels beckon to them Those inside readily take the cue And so the current of enthu siasm gathers volume and intensity and the cheers of the boys rend the air

* * * *

We are taking our dinner, and immediately we hear this bustle we go out to see what is hap pening The fine spirit of the boys touches a res ponsive chord within us and we are off to join the procession—my brother and I Our mother, no doubt, is still admonishing us from behind!

And we march merrily along The boys have already swelled into an unruly crowd With great

difficulty we bring some order out of the chaos and proceed in a more disciplined fashion. One of us leads and the others sing stirring national songs in chorus. We pass in front of a Mission School. We do not wish to create a row here. So we approach the European Principal and request him to allow the elderly boys to join us. It is a surprise to us that he is so sympathetic while the heads of the other institutions behaved so rudely.

The procession is now in full swing and we proceed gaily on through the important streets of the city—the armoured cars notwithstanding—and finally reach the vast tank-bed, where a meeting of the citizens has been arranged for in order to protest against the arrest of the revered leader. Some of the speakers use strong and defiant language. One of them is our friend, the erstwhile leader of the batch of volunteers who marched to the front only the other day. His eyes have caught mine.

"Carry on, my friend."

VIII

Business takes me into the heart of Tamil Nad. The day dawns clear and bright when the railway train steams in at our destination. And what a

huge crowd has gathered here on the platform at this early hour! I have just got out of the carriage and have begun to greet friends, when I notice that the big mass of humanity has been broken up in an instant into several groups formed round the common nucleus—the daily newspaper—which has just been handed out from the train It does not take long to spot the usual bit of news—the arrest of another well-known leader A Hartal is declared on the spot My boss, who is also there, does not want to be behind-hand and so our official duties for the day are suspended We convey the message into the town quick enough and the news is broadcast in a few minutes I soon realise, however, that all this enthusiasm is devastating in its effects upon me, for I miss my breakfast and am consequently considerably disconcerted! No payment, however tempting, moves the hotel-wallah!

* * * *

It is about four in the afternoon People have already begun to gather together at the Bazaar-chowk, and the sun is still blazing hot A little while later the crowd marches into the town All and sundry join the motley throng *en route*, till it swells into huge and unmanageable proportions, but not by any means an unruly mob

The volunteers are pacing ahead in regular file and the stirring songs and slogans tend to make the processionists fairly orderly and disciplined Though the language is new to me, I find that Tamil is well-suited to these war songs The sound and the metre accord wonderfully with the spirit of the times Here is a sample

"No elephant, no galloping steed,
nor any armour whatsoever,
A strange war this!
Truth our only shield and non-violence
our sabre,
Join us now, Brothers, join us now"

As the battallions move forward in this manner, the 'enemy' gets busy parading his khaki clad forces here and there

* * * *

What a fine protest meeting we have on the river sands this evening!

I say, is it human speech or fire and brimstone? It looks as though a regular artillery has been released against an invisible foe Speaker after speaker flings his poisoned darts at the enemy

One of them suggests a bon-fire of foreign clothes and you immediately see heaped up before

you, a huge pile of the 'despicable' though costly stuff, which is soon consumed by the conflagration An unending stream of clothes pours into the fire from all directions Look there! One man throws away all his clothes and hardly any vesture covers his body!

What with the speeches, the demonstrations and the excitement, it is no wonder that we have forgotten the passage of time The moon has already lit up the horizon and the clouds of smoke rising from the sacrificial fire are clearly discernible in the moonlight Imagination darts quickly back to the vanished glories of a distant past when sacrificial fires were a daily occurrence in the lives of our ancestors Is this smoke a grim reminder of our forsaken duties and the forgotten glories?

My reflective mood receives a sudden check by a slight commotion in the gathering Notices have been served on some of the speakers warning them to keep peace in 'future' So for the 'present' we are safe and we disperse amidst triumphant cries and cheers which rise up into the high heavens along with the smoke from the great bon-fire

IX

Things are moving quick and fast The *manager of our city firm goes away to the front.*

So I am tied down to work in his place. My travelling role has been suspended *sine die*. The measuring rod has no attraction for me. But I must stick to my place and do the allotted job suppressing my wander-lust.

One fine morning a strange visitor calls on us. All his clothes are tattered; his head is bruised severely, and he is actually limping with great difficulty. How could this tall and respectable-looking young man have got into a scrape?

"Hullo Doctor! You in this plight!"

"Yes. It is the reward for my services."

"So you joined the fight. But how did it come about that you received injuries? We hope you did not display any violence."

"Certainly not. All the violence came from the other side."

"It is news indeed. Please do tell us your story."

"It was about two months ago that I enlisted as a volunteer. I was practising at A..., when—

"When like others of your age, you were caught up in the whirl-wind of enthusiasm, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I went to the Andhra province for work. I was witnessing one of the usual demon-

strations of the big stick—the lathi—with a view to render some aid to the poor victims of the savage and brutal attack When I was actually engaged in this work a heavy stick descended spitefully on my head I fell down almost senseless on the spot I was belaboured again and left to myself A kindly soul passing that way seems to have removed me to a neighbouring inn and nursed me carefully for some hours When I recovered my senses I found that I was badly beaten and bruised My right leg was hurt and I could hardly walk Blood had flown freely and all my clothes were stained crimson No help could be got from the local doctors who were afraid of sheltering us—rebels I could not help myself either"

He is practically exhausted after having spoken so much We bid him stop and add by way of a query

"So you wisely took the earliest train homewards?"

"Yes," he nods

I accompany him home and entrust him to the care of his people

On my way back I begin to ponder over the affair "How long would it take for him to be his old self again? What about his lucrative

practice at A:...? Can he gather up his broken threads once more? What about his wife and little children?"

The stinking odour of the blood-stained clothes comes from afar and chokes my thoughts.

X

I write the following letter to an Engineer friend:

"Dear friend,

There is war everywhere; war within and war without; urges and counter urges which shake the very soul. But somehow all bonds must be broken and a decision taken at once. Otherwise there is no peace for me. And so I am writing this to you in all haste.

The time seems to be ripe enough for crying halt to the ordinary duties of the day. The dull commonplace routine must make room for something big and grand. And why fail when the opportunity appears to be knocking at our very door? Of course, you have your difficulties. Your father might not see eye to eye with you. Your mother is perhaps dreaming of a sweet daughter-in-law who would step in with a little sunshine

into the household This and a thousand other reasons might stare you in the face.

But all these problems shall vanish into thin air if you just consider my plight And how about the position of a hundred others who have gone before us? Moreover, is our memory so shortlived as to forget the brave talk we had with our friends' parents when we reconciled them to the separation from their dear ones? And who knows, a few of them might have already received their reward!

So make up your mind and give some respite to your tunnel-digging We had rather lend a hand to that bigger tunnel which they are digging out there.

I shall meet you at your place next week-end If we talk here, my mother will scent danger and spoil our plans before they are hatched

Adieu till we meet,

Your dear friend
and
soldier in the making,
P."

put into my hands a cocoanut—the symbol of fulfilment. They performed "aratı" wishing us success in our endeavours Then we marched on to the accompaniment of band and music, each volunteer carrying the tri-coloured flag triumphantly in his hand Even the train which carried us all seemed to be proud of its passengers As previously arranged we got down at the penultimate station and marched forth in groups of three and four

When we had reached the outskirts of the town, a few of the military officers, who had got scent of us, came to threaten us with their loaded rifles Nothing daunted, we marched on Very soon, about half-a-dozen of us—the so-called leaders—were caught hold of and the rest were taken away to distant places Report says that they were left to the tender mercies of the woods.

We were then removed to the officer's camp and our flags and other belongings were forcibly snatched from us. (The little memento that you gave me as a present at the time of our parting has also gone with the rest) A farce of a trial was then got up and each of us was sentenced to imprisonment for a period of twelve months So we are all in here and in good company too. We do

not know what is going on outside the four walls of the prison. Anyway, we are dreaming of the promised land. What more can prisoners do?

Your sincere friend,
R."

XII

I stick to my programme this week-end. My friend is there on the platform hailing me in a loud and enthusiastic voice.

"How far is your camp from here?" I ask him.

"About five miles. A 'bus is plying there just now."

"I should prefer to walk the distance, though. You see, we can talk over a number of things on the way," I tell my friend.

And what a glorious evening we have! The sun is just going down over the hills in all his majesty, and looks as though he desires the earth and the sky and the horizon to share all the glory of his colour and light during the brief interval that remains for him to bid the world good-night! And that brief half-hour is "very heaven" to us. We are sauntering along the solitary road—almost forgetting our very existence.

The beauty of the evening, the undulating and meandering track that we have got to traverse, and the glorious panorama of hill and dale which appears at every turn before us, and, above all, the spirit of youthful abandon which has been animating us, have all conspired together to lend a touch of romance to our sordid existence and we appear to have been lifted up a few feet off the solid ground

"I say, your camp seems to be a long way off"

"No, no Don't you see the bright lights yonder there?"

"Yes I do"

And when we actually reach the spot I am overjoyed, because it is a bit of fairy land in that countryside All the amenities of modern life, electric lights, taps, etc, have been supplied in plenty, and the whole camp is illuminated

We finish our evening repast quick enough and go out on a round of inspection through the camp area and outside, talking all the while

* * * *

We go out 'sight-seeing' the next morning

"What is the idea behind the tunnel works?" I ask my friend

"You see, there is a channel proceeding from the huge dam at K.... This is a hilly tract, which is at a higher level. So the tunnel is intended to open up the channel to the low-lying tracts in the valley below."

"*It is a huge piece of engineering enterprise,*" I comment. "How many feet have you gone beneath the earth's surface?"

"Two hundred feet."

"Would it not be cheaper if you dug up a channel here also?"

"No, no. The cost of the tunnel works out much cheaper. Hence the project."

"Shall we get underground and see the labourers at work?"

"By all means."

"What are these parallel rails for?"

"Don't you see the trucks further up carrying the earth and debris upwards?" asks my friend somewhat surprised at my ignorance.

He then directs the torch he is carrying with him towards a group of labourers at work underground.

"How did these Frontier men come here?" I ask *him a little taken aback by their presence.*

"Because they are a faithful and hardworking set of men."

"Faithful indeed they ought to be, for I have seen a large number of them being employed as watchkeepers by big firms in the cities."

"Moreover, they work away fearlessly heedless of the risks inherent in this dangerous type of work," adds my engineer friend

"How do their wages work out?"

"Of course, they demand higher wages, but they have proved to be more useful than the local men"

"So, that explains the influx of such a large contingent of these men from the remotest north to the southern parts!" I exclaim, rather satisfied.

Suddenly a thought strikes me and I begin to wonder why such honest labour cannot be provided for, to their brethren in the towns and cities, where, they, by force of circumstances perhaps, fleece the poverty-stricken populace by practising that thrice-cursed profession—usury.

* * * *

The engineer bids good-bye to his friends and officers and his busy camp life and the noise of the exploding dynamite, and we reach our city the same evening—full of joy and even jubilation in our hearts

CHAPTER II

Camp No. 1—THE TOWN

"The bell is gone. Wake up, wake up, all of you."

The voice is approaching me nearer and and nearer. I am still crouching in my bed pretending not to heed it.

"I say, why don't you get ready for the prayer?"—the voice rings in my ears.

"Why don't you spare me, *Baba*? You know that I am a late-riser and it is so cold at our place."

"But this is not your home and we must all maintain some discipline. You see, the leader is already crying out," replies my friend and actually pulls off my covering.

"Discipline or no, I shall join the prayer party only on one condition," I tell him.

"And that is?"

"I must have a dose of nice hot coffee immediately after."

"Agreed. You shall have a good *Dosai* too."

II

We are on the tip-toe of excitement to-day. Half-a-dozen of us are asked to march on to S...,

the head quarters of the fighting area We have longed to go there all these days and we have got the chance so soon

"Thank you very much, Director"

* * * *

The 'bus in which we have been travelling is stopped by a constable at a way side village

"Are there any volunteers in here?" he asks

"Yes"

"Please get down, all of you"

"Why?"

"You must report yourselves at the police outpost"

"Why don't you register our names here? There are other passengers who will be inconvenienced"

"The Daffedar has ordered that you must be taken there," blurts out the limb of law and order And a police-man's order is an order

We trudge along for some distance and the constable leads us into a small building, evidently the police 'thana'

There is a man in plain clothes squatting before a small writing desk That is no doubt the Daffedar Sahib

"What do you want of us?" we demand

"What is your name?" he asks one of the party

"So and so"

"Your father's name?"

" "

"Where do you come from?"

"Your occupation?"

"Where do you go now?"

"Why do you go there?"

He asks a hundred and one questions and notes down the answers in his slow and shabby fashion The poor man's educational career had evidently, an untimely brake applied to it

A single person's examination takes a quarter of an hour We wish to hurry up matters So we do the writing for him and avoid the repetition of the catechism

'Thank you, Daffedar Sahib May we go now?"—we want to take our leave of him But he does not seem to let us go so easy

"No You should not go There are orders from the superintendent to the effect that you should be stopped here"

"Please show us the order?"—we ask

"It is a private circular—not an order to be shown"

A shrewd man in our party sees through the game and says — It is all right, policeman We are all prepared to stop away But you must look to our needs"

At this, the man is outwitted He tries to apologise to us "No Sirs, you may proceed We have received instructions just to note down the names of the volunteers who go out of the district This is the District outpost, you see"

"We see your big moustaches well enough, you thick headed dolt,"—we say to ourselves, somewhat exasperated "You have needlessly delayed the service 'bus and put the other passengers to so much trouble"

* * * *

It is past mid day when we reach the head quarters We are all very hungry and eager to rush to the camp to have our food

But? No! The constable on duty here won't let us go Again the catechism has to be gone

through "Your name?—father's name—etc, etc—"

This takes another half-an-hour and we are cursing the fellow bitterly We have eaten nothing since yesternight

III

All of us settle down to work with full vigour Enough spade work has been done The man in charge of the 'Taluka' hails from my place and is a good friend of mine That makes matters easy for me

The office is located in the heart of the town The whole of the top floor is at our disposal The ground floor contains the shop and dwelling quarters of the owner It is very good of him to have ventured to accommodate us—volunteers Any day he may reap the fruit of his hardihood

My friend is a very capable organiser He has put the office in perfect order Everything about it is spick and span The correspondence is attended to promptly and regularly An efficient courier service has been established throughout the Taluka—not an easy job in this formidable forest region I am amazed at the systematic and disciplined fashion in which the work goes

on. Each volunteer seems to perform his task smilingly and ungrudgingly. And what is the remuneration for all this? Two coarse meals a day and a warrant of arrest impending at every moment!

The general camp is situated outside the town—about a mile from our office. But we need not go there for our food Special arrangements have been made for us in an adjoining house This saves so much time and bother.

IV

I am asked to take charge of the 'Daily Bulletin' The conducting of this news bulletin is a very useful and important item of our work. The news service is an all-embracing affair. For instance, there is the editorial column, and the news column—the bulk of which is taken up with the numerous arrests and convictions, reports of which pour in every day. Besides, we have got to educate the villagers on every important as well as trivial aspect of our work, for most of them have had very little schooling—if any. Of course, one of the columns must be devoted to the issuing of strict disciplinary injunctions to the volunteers, who are our accredited representatives in the inaccessible villages

The bulletin comes out very regularly every day—not printed, but cyclostyled. We get hundreds of copies made and broadcast them far and wide. Thanks to our courier service, these precious documents reach the remotest village in the interior. No, not even the official gazette is looked forward to with such eagerness and awe by the villagers, as our unpretentious news-sheet! You may run up into any village of an evening and see the eager faces of the simple folk gathered round our volunteer, who is scanning every line and word of the sheet in the feeble lamp-light.

Even in this Taluka town, this is a welcome feature. In this out of the way place, far away from any rail-road, it is difficult to get correct news from time to time. But it is a different matter so long as we are there.

No doubt, we demand a small payment for the bulletin in the town—just to raise the cost of its upkeep. Otherwise, how else can we get the wherewithal to run it for months together? And the little urchins who are in charge of the sales have become experts in the trade!

V

I am in my element doing this work. Especially the editorials are dashed off with a

facility and grace I had never dreampt myself to be capable of It is a wonder, how I have been managing it so well, for up to this time, writing was not much in my line And mark you! We are all practically strangers to our mother tongue!

* * * *

This is the day of national rejoicing, for, we have to celebrate the feast in honour of God Ganapathi, who is symbolically represented as half-man and half-elephant. This gives me the clue and the inspiration for the day's editorial Moreover, the people should be prepared for the big programme on the second day after the feast.

"Comrades,

Even as the elephant—who is next of kin to our God Ganapathi—moves about in the forest, majestically, uprooting the trees, and twisting and tearing asunder the branches with his trunk,—so should you, valiantly break the forest laws and carry away with you some twigs, as a memento.

"Celebrate the feast to-day as best you can, eat as many puddings as your belly can hold But you should not rest content with doing this You must show to the world at large that you are capable and free citizens of India.

"So, on the appointed day, you must muster strong in your thousands to defy these laws which are verily chains binding you hand and foot and making you slaves in your own homes! Please remember that nothing on earth can shake *the determined will of a united people*!

"Gird up your loins, you brave men and women of our sacred land, and prepare yourselves for an effective demonstration on the morrow of the—

"You may get into the forest and cut a few trees without fear In the evening you must all march on foot from your villages and gather together near our office here But mind you, perfect order and calm should be maintained throughout And not a little finger should be raised against the officers who may try to trouble you!

"Detailed instructions have been issued in this regard to the volunteers who will guide you and lead you in batches into the town

"Put all your faith in our God Ganapathi—the dispeller of evil and the destroyer of obstacles—and all will be well with you Adieu"

The programme is also announced by beat of drum in the town and in the bigger villages

VI

Things turn out to be successful far beyond our expectations. The whole taluka is *en fete* on the appointed day. Reports have been pouring in at our office since early morning regarding the disciplined and peaceful conduct of the villagers and the successful breaking of the forest laws.

There are no doubt rumours of strong and vindictive action from the opposite camp. But they appear to have been baffled by the very strength of our party. Whom can they pick and choose when the whole population is up in arms?

We are eagerly awaiting the public demonstration in the evening in order to gauge our strength.

* * * *

Batch after batch of villagers begins to bombard our office in the early after-noon. At about 5 p.m. there are a few thousands gathered there. We are watching the scene from the top floor with bated breath. It looks as though a regular army has sprung out of the wilderness. The whole street, nay, the whole town is filled with these rustic folk obeying our behests in a mood of wild enthusiasm.

Is it any wonder that our hearts open out in sympathy and pity at the sight of these half-clad, half-fed, and unlettered peasants gathering here in their thousands and registering their protest against an age-long oppression? What is the secret of all this strength? Nothing but implicit faith in the words of the poor and unassuming volunteer and a solemn resolve to break, at long last, the fetters that bind them. They verily believe that their redemption is in sight!

As the evening advances the on-rush of this surging tide of humanity assumes unheard-of proportions. Village after village appears to have got emptied itself into the town. This army consists of men, women and children of all ages and of all stages of growth—mental, physical and moral. But owing to the inspiration of the moment, they act as one man. They are marching along in single file and in military array headed by the trusted volunteers. The occasional blowing of the village bugle imparts a heroic and dramatic touch to the whole scene. And the most picturesque—and perhaps pathetic—feature of it all, is the carrying on their heads by the villagers of the twigs and logs of wood—sandal, teak and other timber—symbolic of their protest

against the inhuman forest laws Up till now, even the touching of a tree in the forest was deemed an offence and was attended with the risk of severe punishment

As for myself, I shall treasure this picture forever in my memory, the picture of these simple men and women, with their bent and shrivelled bodies, carrying on their heads and shoulders, the twigs and branches of trees, verily the olive palms of victory in this peaceful mass revolt

Tears trickle down our cheeks at the sight of this oppressed section of humanity and we solemnly pledge ourselves on this sacred day, not to betray the faith they have reposed in us We just speak some words of encouragement and bid them farewell

VII

Emboldened at the overwhelming success, we decide to put a stop to this activity We desire to go a step further and to fight on another issue We immediately issue instructions to the various camps cancelling the programme of defying the forest laws Where is the fun in repeating the process when its purpose has been served? We ask the volunteers to educate the villagers

and to stress the need for withdrawing their co-operation from the authorities. How can this be done effectively? Obviously, by advising the village headmen to send in their resignations to the official head of the Taluka. But it must be impressed on their minds that this will result in personal persecution. They must be prepared to take the consequences. Only such men need take the step.

These Patels and Talatis are the accredited representatives of the authorities in the villages; they are the agents through whom their innocent brethren in the villages are harassed and exploited. And when these village officers withdraw their co-operation, it is a big step forward. Not only will the rulers begin to realise the fundamental weakness of ruling a people against the people's will, but the fight will become straight and effective by the elimination of these middle-men.

VIII

The progress in this direction is reported to us regularly. There is good reason to believe that we are forging ahead. On the day appointed for the purpose more than a score of Patels turn up at our office with their letters of resigna-

tion We notice that the letters are not properly worded So we advise them to couch them in a more courteous and dignified language We help them in this work, for most of the headmen are practically unlettered Moreover, they have been used to discourtesy by their superiors all their lives Why should they not pay them back in the same coin? We argue with them and tell them that that is not the spirit in which our campaign should be fought. They agree

Not merely that There is no use despatching these letters of resignation by post and on the sly. This should also be an example to the wavereis Besides, the very nature of our fight demands that our methods should be open and straightforward

It is therefore arranged that all the Patels should go in a body and present their precious documents in person to the Mamlatdar—who is the magisterial and revenue head of the Taluka It need not be mentioned that an admiring crowd of villagers, and some of the townsmen also, accompany these heroes I have got to join the party as the authorised press representative, for everything must be recorded in my 'Bulletin' accurately

IX

The magistrate is somewhat taken aback by the vast assemblage outside the Katcheri. We see that the crowd stay out peacefully. Only the patels who have come on business get in. As soon as they enter the court hall, the magistrate pushes his glasses down the bridge of his nose and casts a scrutinising glance over the party.

The patels respectfully present their letters into his hands. He peruses a few of them and begins to realise their significance. He is perturbed and not a little embarassed at the boldness of the sentiments voiced therein. He realises that it is no use trying to argue with them in the matter. But as an officer he must perform his duty.

He therefore asks them as to whether their resolve is irrevocable.

"Yes," comes the answer.

"Then provide substitutes and I shall let you go."

"No, it is not our job. You are of course at perfect liberty to appoint others. We shall not come in your way."

But the poor Magistrate knows that it is not so easy to secure others to take their places.

He then tries to coax them He tries other methods He says that they will lose their power and prestige in the village. They will be nowhere afterwards They are being deluded with false hopes and are not looking at things as practical men They are listening to the airy, fairy promises of an interested third party. This method also fails Finally he begins to threaten them "I say, your successors would harass you. You will be hauled up for all sorts of offences Your property will be attached." And more in the same strain.

But no! The brave villagers stand adamant! Once they have made up their minds there is no going back, come what might.

When the Mamlatdar finds that his frank advice and even the threats are of no avail, he accepts the resignations and lets them go. The patels come back triumphantly amidst the vociferous cheers of the crowd that follows them.

X

We are very much satisfied at the turn things have taken. But this is not all. A good deal of headway has yet to be made. Only a handful of patels have resigned. This would be useful only if the whole district followed suit. We therefore

consider it important to develop and sustain the enthusiasm that has been evoked to-day. A public meeting is called for immediately. And in this town our word is law. At our bidding the whole population of the town congregates inside the premises of the temple of "Mari"—the presiding deity of the town. This is the usual place for holding all meetings, including the Keertan parties. But to-day the whole quadrangle is filled to over-flowing and scenes of unbounded enthusiasm are witnessed.

Our main object is to congratulate these patels who have resigned to-day. At the start, some of the leading townsmen speak eulogising the villagers who have taken such a bold step in the interests of the country. It has been no small achievement.

Finally, my friend, who has been directing the operations, appears on the platform. He receives a tremendous ovation when he begins to speak. This is the first occasion on which the villagers come into personal touch with the leader who has been their guiding spirit all along. Most of them have not even seen him—let alone hearing him.

And now they have got more than they had bargained for. He is speaking to them and

telling them what their duties are at the present juncture As for my part, I am surprised to recognise in him a good and effective speaker For one thing we have all practically forgotten to speak in our mother tongue and the people of these parts use such a strange dialect of our language that one is hard put to it to understand them or to bring home to them one's thoughts and sentiments My friend however, seems to have overcome these difficulties and expresses himself in quite an intelligible manner His experience as a school teacher stands him in good stead

In slow and measured tones, but emphatically enough, he brings home to them the fact that though they have fared splendidly to day, much more yet remains for them to do This is only the beginning of the fight A grim struggle is yet ahead of us We must prove our mettle then We must prepare ourselves for all kinds of molestation, physical and otherwise We have to face imprisonment and worse Who knows?—even our lives may be at stake! But nothing valuable is gained in this world without sacrifice Again, the important feature of our struggle is that our opponents should not be hurt by any means No, not even in the face

of the gravest provocation If this aspect of the problem is borne in mind and followed up in practice, our success is assured.

* * * *

It is already late in the night and we soon bring the meeting to a close. Some of the villagers stop there for the night, but so many cannot afford to remain away from their forest homes.

XI

The air is thick with rumours of fiery ordinances to be promulgated by the authorities. These new laws are designed to crush our activities In fact, their appearance is foreshadowed by the strong action of the authorities in the northern provinces It is only a question of days for the public announcement and the application of these special measures to our province When they begin to operate, all our activities must come to a standstill

Under these circumstances, we should either meekly submit ourselves to the authorities and get into prison or try to meet the situation by adopting fresh methods of attack I am therefore deputed to run up to the Provincial Headquarters to discuss the position with our chief

I start on my mission the same day. When I reach the town I find that it is in the throes of a mighty election campaign Two rival sections are engaged in a fierce and raging propaganda I notice that all our men have thrown in their lot in this fight and the huge machinery of our organisation is working full blast The programme includes processions, Keertan parties in the night, shouting of slogans, the carrying of party flags and other modes of demonstration In the Keertans, even the gods are besought to favour one party as against the other 'All is fair in love and war! Then why not in this election affair?'

In this tumult and confusion, I cannot even get at our chief who is fully submerged in this work I am therefore compelled to stay there longer than I can afford Anyhow, on the third day of my arrival I am able to snatch a few moments off his hands and discuss with him the plans for work in the future

If the ordinances begin to operate it will be impossible to carry on an open fight And the people have not yet been educated to such an extent as to enable them to carry on the fight without our help It is very likely that without proper guidance they may easily break into

violence and spoil the good work that has been accomplished so far.

Of course, this does not mean that all the volunteers should avoid the hardships of jail life At least the leaders should remain out of the orbit of immediate arrest and guide the volunteers and the people until the work can be safely entrusted to the public at large and they can carry on the fight automatically for some time And the prison doors are quite open to receive us whenever we wish to enter them

To this end, I am also asked to go prospecting and to find out the possibilities of carrying on the fight from across the frontier For one thing, we cannot be so easily hauled up in that territory where the administration is in different hands And if proper communications are established with the local leaders on this side of the country, we can surely achieve something worth our while

* * * *

While at Headquarters, I am able to study the position of the fight in the other provinces, where the famous ordinances have already taken effect All the important newspapers have been gagged and heavy security demanded of them Most of the leaders are clapped into prison and the people at large beaten black and blue with

the lathi In the bigger cities, the publication of the cyclostyled bulletins is prohibited and the copies seized A large number of women and children who have now joined the fight are harassed in every possible way Even the lands and property of so many peasants have been confiscated and a large number of them have migrated into the adjoining territory, seeking shelter under the trees and in the woods So the fight has now assumed a grim and terrible aspect

When I return to the camp after three days I find that trouble is already brewing there Impending warrants of arrest against the volunteers are the main topic of gossip in the town At any rate, they say that our leader will be booked at once

* * * *

Everyone has been eagerly awaiting my return I communicate to them the instructions of the chief It is decided that the leader should start immediately and seek shelter in the forest region and should guide the operations from a distance But my friend is confident that he will not be hauled up so soon and wishes to stay on for a couple of days to finish up odd bits of work that are remaining

XII

But our worst suspicions are confirmed, and when the morning dawns my friend is greeted while yet in bed with a warrant of arrest The reason that is set forth is that his speech at the public meeting the other day contained seditious matter and that he must appear before the magistrate for trial This is indeed strange, because I had closely followed my friend's speech and had complimented him on the sober and careful way he spoke

So that is that My friend should pack up his kit and march off to the local lock up to enjoy his well deserved rest The news spreads like wild fire and a huge crowd appears on the scene The people must bid him farewell with due pomp and ceremony They lavish all their affection and regard on their beloved leader who has conducted the fight so tactfully and peace fully all these days He is practically bending under the weight of garlands that adorn his neck and he is led out in procession throughout the town Band and music accompany the party and the enthusiasm of the people is unbounded and spontaneous The policemen also follow at a respectful distance from their ward It is past midday by the time the procession covers the

whole town and our friend is led triumphantly into the precincts of the small prison in the town

XIII

The outlook is gloomy enough But we manage the affairs as best we can My 'Bulletin' has still some lease of life and occupies much of my time My readers are told that the arrest of our leader is the signal for the grim struggle that is ahead of us That means that the opposite party has begun to understand our strength They cannot afford to ignore us any longer We must also face the situation boldly and push our schemes forward with unabated vigour This is the most practical method of demonstrating our regard and affection for our leader

* * * *

This has the desired effect and the arrest does prove to be an incentive for further work The police had imagined that our activities would come to a standstill when the guiding spirit was removed from the field On the contrary, they notice that the opposition to the authorities is gathering fresh momentum as evidenced by the large number of additional resignations from the patels We also learn that a couple of

high-placed officials have withdrawn themselves from service

The police get more busy They catch hold of a few of the big leaders of the town and haul them up for similar offences, viz, seditious speeches and propaganda Some of our volunteers working in the villages are also arrested and brought into the town

As days advance, the number of arrests increases and the Taluka lock up cannot accommodate this huge crowd But those who are tried and convicted cannot be removed to the District prison which is also full

The authorities are now in a dilemma They cannot afford to ignore our activities nor can they arrest us in a hurry It is a hard job for them to look after the needs of the people who are now in their custody The subsistence allowance provided is so meagre that most of our friends cannot get even the regulation rations that are allowed them We suggest to the Magistrate that matters should be set right But what can he do? His hands are tied We therefore come to an understanding with him and arrange to get into our hands the usual allowance and supplement it by our own resources So, the problem of food is solved rather amicably and we get into

the good books of the police. Our volunteers are allowed to go with us freely into the town and to look after their comforts The police constables also know that these new prisoners are a different lot and can be trusted implicitly for their integrity

* * * *

The mutual understanding and goodwill that has been established between the two opposite camps—the custodians of law as against those who unceremoniously break it—reaches its climax on a certain day.

* * * *

The prisoners numbering about a hundred are allowed to hold a feast and to offer worship to our friend 'Ganapathi' outside the premises of the lock-up. The whole scene has something romantic about it. There is the sacred peepul tree which has shot up into the sky to a magnificent height and its branches have spread all round The tree stands in the centre of the large platform built around it. The 'Elephant God' has been installed at the foot of the tree with due pomp and ceremony The prisoners line up on both sides of the deity and perform the 'puja' in right royal fashion with the offering of flowers and the chanting of sacred hymns Some of us

who are still at large have been watching the scene from a distance and the policemen also join us We are all overcome by emotion at this strange spectacle The so-called prisoners appear to be more at liberty than most of us and after a little while all of us, including the policemen, join them in offering worship at the same altar. I, for one, feel that I have been transported—for a moment though it be—into realms of ineffable joy and beatitude, those realms where conflicting emotions are dissolved in an unending stream of peace and harmony and bliss

Even the noon-day sun assumes a sober aspect when we receive 'prasadam' at the hands of these strange prisoners and disperse for the day.

XIV

The ordinances have been encircling us with lightning rapidity. We feel their iron grip on us already The local authorities have now been armed with every weapon of offence and defence On the other hand, we are unarmed and tongue-tied If we just open our lips, the very voice will be recorded and we shall be carried away unceremoniously All processions and demonstrations have been prohibited, our serviceable Bulletin has been banned, and the generous-minded citizen is warned, at the point of the bayonet,

For this purpose, my Bulletin comes in handy. Its publication is, no doubt, tabooed But we cannot do without it So, we have the duplicating machine removed from our office to a safe place and we carry on our propaganda with redoubled vigour The policemen are hard put to it to discover the whereabouts of the machine. Under their very nose, the copies of the Bulletin are sold or distributed and the same little imps are in charge of the sales, and yet they are unable to trace its origin The little boys are even beaten and ill-treated, but without avail

We manage like this until we feel sure that enough propaganda has been carried on and that the people have fully realised the significance of the non-violent nature of our struggle The local leaders are now in a position to carry on the fight by themselves

* * * *

I must now go prospecting into the frontier of the district before launching on any new scheme I run up the same evening to the next town which is very near the frontier I notice that I have been shadowed by someone during my journey I want to meet a leader of this town and to discuss with him our plans for future

against accommodating us or listening to our words How can we pursue the fight under these circumstances?

The leading townsmen come forward and suggest a way out 'If they are so stubborn," they argue, 'why should we not meet them on the same ground? For our part, we are prepared to play their own game against them We shall boycott these officers completely Our merchants will not sell provisions to them, and we shall not extend any social amenities to these people If you only say the word, we shall see that they are completely ostracised in every way If they cannot get their food and clothing how can they get along for a single day, let alone their harassing us? Then they will surely come round"

The argument, no doubt, sounds well and we are sure that the people are very sincere and capable of executing their proposals But how can we ever say 'aye' to them in this matter?

It is a vital and recognised principle of our warfare that the enemy should on no account be harmed, either physically or otherwise On the other hand, he is at liberty to persecute you, if he gives one blow, you must ask for two Queer logic indeed! But this must be instilled into the hearts of the villagers

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day Therefore I am taken to his place after nightfall We sit overnight and discuss the programme He is quite willing to co operate with us I tell him that I shall first communicate with our chief at headquarters and then get into touch with him before starting work

The next morning I start off towards the adjoining country in order to complete my plans We have been travelling in a service 'bus and when we have reached the border, I hear a tremendous roar of waters of a thundering cataract I am told that the famous waterfall of my home province is only a few yards off I have yearned to see that sight ever since my early boyhood and just when a stretch of the hand can reach it, I cannot afford the pleasure Alas! What an irony of fate!

Anyhow, I breathe a sigh of relief when the border has been crossed I have now entered my homeland and into freedom

CHAPTER III

Camp No. 2—THE FOREST

Strictly speaking, I must now run back to the Provincial Headquarters and submit my report to the chief. But my home is so near. Why should I not pay a flying visit to Mother? She will be so pleased to see me. And I am not going to be court-martialled if I spend the week-end at home. Moreover, I may not get such an opportunity again.

* * * *

When I reach the city, I first call at the firm where I had been working. I wish to meet my assistant, who is now in-charge of the work. He will be in a position to tell me something about Mother.

"Are my mother and brother well?" I ask him.

"I trust they are; it is a long time since I saw them."

"Are they continuing at our old residence?"

"I heard they had shifted from there. But I have not seen the new dwelling."

I can at once notice an attitude of indifference and unconcern in his talk and demeanour.

And this man had promised to take personal interest in my affairs during my absence!

* * * *

It is not very difficult to locate the new house Mother has rented a suite of rooms in a new locality

This is the house Let me get in unnoticed, and take her by surprise Yes, that is Mother, sitting cross legged before the deity, in a mood of fervent prayer Two oil lamps are burning before the sacred niche She is offering flowers in profusion Hush! You can hear her words clearly now That is her prayer to the Almighty "Oh Iswara! Please see that my son returns home hale and hearty Let him go through the ordeal as quickly as possible and unhurt"

This is the proper moment for announcing myself

"Mother, your prayer has been heard and I am here in response to it!"

She turns round at me with great surprise But she does not talk to me at once, nor does she exhibit any sign of tenderness I know the reason I also know that I am at fault A few minutes pass in silence I think that I must break the ice myself

woman like me to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the family all alone?"—she almost takes my breath away

"Am I not making sufficient amends for my fault by coming now, Mother? I hope you will grant me the necessary permission this time" I wish to involve her unwares, but she does not commit herself so easily

On the other hand, she turns the conversation into a different channel She enumerates the hardships that they had to undergo after my departure

She cools down a bit, however, after registering her protest I now begin to take stock of my surroundings

The house is very badly situated It is a part of a regular colony of houses scattered helter-skelter and built somehow within a single enclosure, without any regard to sanitation or hygiene There are half-a dozen families living here There are common bath rooms and common latrines—all huddled up, one into the other Ours is the worst of the lot It is placed right at the end and the dung heap and latrine are so close I find it hard to bear it even for a few hours It is a wonder how my mother and brother are sticking on all these days in these filthy and

squalid surroundings But I should not open my lips now, for I am responsible for it myself and I shall be caught in the trap of my making

* * * *

When my brother returns from school, I get more information My mother was very angry at my conduct But all the same, she was leading a very rigorous life—living on scanty food and even going without food for days together She was under the impression that I was already in jail and that I was suffering all kinds of hardships Hers was a sympathetic fast I had suspected as much already I know how mother loves me But why should she fast? I am quite well off out there

II

I wish to turn my stay here for a couple of days to some good account Why should I not try to make some collections for the fight? Ours is of a new type altogether It is carried on by the charity and good will of the people at large There is no organised source of income whatsoever We have to protect the interests of the people who have been squeezed dry already

I happen to know the secretary of the local 'Women's Association' She takes interest in our

fight also and if I represent the state of affairs out there, she may give us considerable help.

* * * *

When I broach the subject with her, she is very much pleased. In fact, the members of the Association have already put together a fairly large sum of money and are thinking of remitting the amount to some other place. But I tell her that our need is greater and that our province should have the first preference. Morever, the poor villagers and volunteers have done such good work that all our resources should be concentrated there. It is not very difficult to convince her. We make arrangements to remit the amount to our provincial headquarters at once.

This is so far as women are concerned. They are decidedly more emotional and they readily respond to tales of suffering and heroism. They are indeed the living embodiment of suffering and they can quite sympathise with the sufferings of others. But how to tackle the men-folk who are made of sterner stuff? I have not much time on my hands, either. I must make haste. I happen to know a few North Indian friends who might be easily persuaded to help us. I consult one of them in the matter. He suggests a good method of approach.

"To morrow, all the members of our faith are going to meet together at the temple," he says "And our Swamiji who has come from the North has undertaken to preach to them Though a man of religion, he is interested in the national struggle I shall request him to put in his plea on our behalf If you attend the meeting, it will be an easy affair We shall open up a list and collect subscriptions there You see, if the appeal comes from a religious head, our people cannot but heed it'

This is indeed a capital suggestion I go to the meeting at the proper time I request an elderly gentleman to accompany me as I do not wish to go there alone He is the Headmaster of a local High School and has a soft corner for me

We listen calmly to the preacher for more than an hour He is speaking in his provincial language on the tenets of Jainism I hardly understand all that he says But I try to follow it as best I can Before concluding his sermon, the good Swamiji makes a strong appeal to the people assembled—men and women gathered there in large numbers "This is a worthy cause and deserves all help This is a fight for our Dharma and in such a non violent fashion too It is a unique experiment in the annals of warfare

and so much in keeping with the precepts of Jainism" This is in effect what he says and this goes home to the people My friend then asks me to present my case by describing the difficulties and sufferings of the people at the front I am now in a quandary The audience cannot follow me if I speak in my mother tongue English most of them do not know And the fool that I am, I have not yet picked up Hindi—our national language, which is easily intelligible to them So I request my Headmaster friend to come to my rescue I had anticipated this situation and had kept him in full touch with the details of the fight He makes a short and sweet appeal in Hindi This produces a very good effect on the audience It is no wonder, for my friend is an accomplished speaker

We are glad that our efforts are attended with success A subscription list is opened on the spot and there are generous contributions forthcoming Don't you think a few hundreds a handsome war fund for the effort of an hour? I feel more than gratified, because the idea had come in a flash to me What is more, this was the first occasion when I had stretched out my hands for help in a public cause

Anyhow, I am highly thankful to these good friends from Gujerat and Marwar. They have

deemed it proper to contribute their mite to the fight in our province, where they have only settled down for purposes of trade If they had so desired they could easily have remitted the collections to their home province, where the fight is graver still

* * * *

I must now face my mother once more I had stayed on a rather long time just to please her and to make my parting smooth

"Mother, it is time I went back Please make the best use of this" I try to put a few coins in her hand, by way of bidding her farewell

"No, I don't need it Do you think it will suffice for a week's expenses?"

She stiffens up and strongly remonstrates against my going back "You have seen how hard up we are How long do you think we can continue in this fashion? There are hundreds of well qualified people who can take care of the fight A single soul cannot alter the situation much Moreover, you can't bear the hardships of jail life for a single day By all that is dear to me, I swear, that you should not go"

I am very much perplexed I, for one, would not have resided in this hell of a house for two

days Now, I am forcing them to stay on here And, suppose, I am jailed for a year or two, what would be their fate? Why should I not stay away? Service to one's mother is not a whit less important than service to the motherland Regarding the latter, I have doubtless done my bit already I am not such an indispensable factor after all

"It is all quite true, my friend But only the other day you called that gentleman who returned from the field a coward," says a voice from within

At this stage, I muster sufficient courage and deliver a big harangue to my mother

"The fight may not last long, after all," I assure her, "and I shall return in a couple of months As for your present plight, I can only say that there are thousands of families in a worse predicament"

* * * *

No son can convince his mother under such circumstances But I am rather happy that I have now come and soothed her feelings At least, my conscience is clear now On the previous occasion, I made a very bad mess of it by having sneaked away from her under false pretences

Moreover, it is good I took this chance to come and see her. It is hard to say what lies in the womb of the future In any case, things are not going to be very rosy hereafter!

III

Here at the headquarters, vast changes have taken place in the course of the few days Most of the old hands have been removed Everywhere you see new faces The office, no doubt, has still been working, and, thank God! our chief has managed to remain at large We can at any rate get some guidance from him

News from the field of my erstwhile activities is very distressing No organised work is possible there As soon as you enter, you will be greeted by your friend, the policeman, and led into the prison forthwith Of course, the local men have been doing their bit in pursuance of our wishes But it is difficult to launch any far-reaching scheme of fight and conduct the campaign from across the frontier This requires considerable time and preparation

I am therefore asked to work up a new Taluka in the district It is an entirely fresh field and one has to begin from the beginning. The people have not been taught the very A B C

of this war It is a very tough and arduous job though What is more, my old weapon is of no avail now, for the Bulletin cannot be edited without grave risk attending it

The experiment is worth trying, notwithstanding all these handicaps and difficulties It will be a regular training for us, volunteers Direct and personal contact will be established with the villagers and we shall certainly learn many a lesson, at first hand, in conducting this new method of warfare

* * * *

I pick up two other volunteers as co workers and pack off the same evening to the new field The 'bus reaches the place at nightfall The town is located in the heart of the forest It is already very dark and it has been raining all the time

We enquire after the two friends, who had come to the town as advance guard to explore the new region But nobody knows about them and we are knocking about in the rain in sheer despair and perplexity

One or two persons whom we meet try to sympathise with us as strangers, but they are afraid of even providing us with shelter for the night when they come to know who we are

At last, a young man, who has seen our plight, comes to our rescue He is a 'bus agent and happens to know our two friends who had come before us They could not get any accommodation in the town and were consequently staying at a cottage two miles away He says, it is very difficult to reach that place in this rain and darkness

"Don't you worry," says he and puts us at ease "You can lodge in our house during the night and I shall take you to your friend's quarters in the morning" We are very much relieved and we thank the young fellow for the kindness and consideration he has shown us

* * * *

We go about reconnoitring in the town in the morning Though it is a Taluka place it is just a big village and a very backward one at that The night's experience does not prompt us to take any initiative with regard to our work We have just been waiting for our friends They come and meet us after a while As anticipated they have not made any headway either They have just managed to get a roof above their heads The people of the village would not accommodate them So they had got hold of a small dwelling situated about two miles from

this place and belonging to a *Swamiji* residing near by

There is no reason why we should get discouraged at this state of affairs How could we expect people to take us into their confidence, when they are not sure of our credentials and when the chances of their getting into trouble are so imminent?

IV

"Let us first repair to the camp and take stock of our position," I tell my friends and we all march off at once to the place

After studying the surroundings, I am more than satisfied, with the situation of this future scene of our activities

What if it is a *little distant* from the town? For that matter, it is the most convenient camp that I have come across, almost an ideal one, and it is quite in keeping with the peaceful struggle we have to carry on It is in the heart of the forest and in the midst of picturesque surroundings

Just a few yards behind our dwelling you see the trees of the forest rising to magnificent heights and growing in wild profusion The building—if such a pretentious term can be applied to this rickety structure, where we have

been allowed to lodge—consists of a number of rooms, constructed somehow Formerly, it was used as a rest-house for travellers and, even at present, it has been serving that purpose to some extent Thank heavens! we have a roof over our heads, and a tiled one at that! As for the flooring, it is more an appology for it than anything else In fact, we sleep on mother earth in her elemental rawness!

Facing us, on the other side of the road, there is the Ashram of the Swamiji who is responsible for our staying here It is by his good offices that our present dwelling has been put up His abode stands on a rising bit of ground which commands an enchanting view all round A beautiful flower and vegetable garden has been reared in front of his dwelling Sufficient taste and care have been displayed in the rearing and designing of the garden The sweet smelling flowers with their varied hues offer a smiling welcome to the visitor Everything about the house and the garden is clean and peaceful

Just on the right side of this Ashram is a beautiful lake (sarovar), a most proper adjunct to the sacred precincts Its limpid waters are a solace to the eye, and cool and refreshing to touch and taste Swimming here shall be a daily

is to allocate proper duties and responsibilities amongst ourselves Two of us have to be in charge of the kitchen Two more can remain at the camp and try to establish contact with the villagers who will halt at the rest-house Of course, when they are free, they can also go into the interior and carry on some propaganda work in the villages

The other two will go into the town to canvass the sympathy and support of the towns folk in our cause and to organise the younger set for the 'Prabhat Pheris,' i e, the morning processions carrying on Bhajan with the shouting of slogans We are sure that we can easily win the children over into our fold They are always more spontaneous in their enthusiasm than the bigger folk and they will eagerly take to anything new, provided it gives free vent to their unbounded energies

* * * *

To day is the first day of our 'missionary' enterprise We must be wary and slow The proselytizing must be carried on carefully This is entirely a new field and any the slightest coercion on our part is sure to spoil our cause

So, with the blessings of the Swamiji, we set about our work We go into the town and con-

sult some of the elders Only a handful of them are sympathetic, but even they are not prepared for any revolutionary programme However, they have no objection to send their children to join the procession —which will be a regular and important feature of our work for sometime. Let us make the best use of this offer for the present

* * * *

It is about noon, when we come back after the preliminary consultations Our friends have been waiting for us We all sit down together like the happy and joyous members of a family and enjoy the simple but appetising fare There was no lunch early morning to-day But some provision should be made for it hereafter. Otherwise, we cannot manage

* * * *

After a short nap, I go to the Ashram to report the day's progress to the Swamiji He is so sympathetic that I think we needs must take him into our confidence in all that we do. Just when the whole town has turned us aside as undesirables, he has provided us with shelter and has even encouraged us to work Moreover, he is considerably older than most of us and consequently rich in experience and in wisdom. He

is also conversant with the local conditions and he must have known the ways of people in these parts So, where is the harm in consulting him?

He evinces keen interest in our talk and approves of our decision "Oh yes, you can make a beginning by conducting the daily prayers and processions It is better to gather momentum slowly"

A few minutes' talk has convinced me that he is not of the usual type of 'sadhus',—those who are either stiff-necked, abominably meek or engrossed in their personal welfare without caring for anything beyond their daily round of duties Our swamiji, on the other hand, has been closely following our movement since its inauguration, and says that we must carry it on to the logical conclusion It is only after being convinced of its righteousness that he has espoused our cause

"I shall give you the best help that a man like me can give"' he assures us

"I am very much impressed with the fine situation of the Ashram'? I tell him "Would you mind my making an exhaustive survey of this beautiful domain?"

"No, certainly not"

He then takes me round and explains to me the significance of every spot His settling down

here is a story by itself He had a tough enough fight with the authorities in securing the place One of the European officers wanted to get it for himself But the Swamiji succeeded at last in getting the necessary permission He got the jungle cleared all by himself How could he get any free labour in this forest region? Nor could he afford to hire the necessary labour So, he had shouldered the axe straightaway After toiling patiently and persistently for months, he had brought the place to the present condition It is, indeed, a heroic attempt "Bravo, my friend!" I say to myself, "It is of such mettle that Sadhus should be made"

* * * *

It is about 4 p m, when we return to his abode after the survey There is a strong craving within me for some hot drink This is my usual hour for coffee But how can I get any in this forest? I take my leave of the Swamiji and come back to meet my friends And what is my surprise and satisfaction when I find them offering me a cup of a warm and delicious drink?

It is neither coffee nor tea But it has a strange and fragrant flavour withal My curiosity is roused and I ask my friends as to what it is and wherefrom they obtained it

They point their finger towards the Ashram opposite and produce a kind of grass before me.

Yes. It is lemon grass I had just noticed it at the Ashram premises But how could I imagine that it would yield such a sweet drink?

"Where did you get the milk from, in this out of the way place?"—I continue my enquiry

"The schoolmaster's people kindly offered a little to us from their scanty supply."

I am glad that my friends have been so resourceful, and it is unanimously resolved that this should be henceforth our usual afternoon drink It is more than nectar in this out of the way place

*

We are a happy band here and we spend the evening roaming about in the woods and indulging in free and unfettered talk.

After supper we discuss our plans for the future and we go to bed tired and happy—the damp earth notwithstanding.

VI

Who is that stalwart man coming to greet us so early? He is powerfully built. all the muscles on his body seem to be standing out in bold relief.

He is wearing only his loin-cloth and carries a big stick in his hand Is it a Rishi of yore coming to bless us? He has come so close to me. He is now addressing me

"Have you had a good night?"

"Yes, thank you"

I now recognise the voice and find to my surprise that he is no other than our friend the Swamiji I had never suspected that he was such a physical giant, when I saw him yesterday. He was fully covered then and hence the difference.

He has come to make kind enquiries about our yesterday's arrangements for food He ought to, now that he is our self-appointed host. He offers some suggestions regarding the future

"I shall put in a word to some of the villagers whom I happen to know. They will procure for you the important items—rice and dal. You need not approach the people of the town for any help, financial or otherwise"

We agree with him.

"Have you any vegetable for to-day's use? It is very difficult to get vegetables in these parts"

"No We tried in the town but could not get any."

"Don't you worry. I shall get you some from my garden."

How very kind of him ! Though a Sadhu, he realises full well our practical needs and creature comforts

* * * *

We march off at once to the town though it is drizzling since morning. This is the first day for our 'Prabhat Pheri' programme and our laziness should not come in the way of our going through it.

There are fifty people gathered there. A few kids have also joined the party though it is so early. This is certainly a good number. We lead the procession and go round the town singing the popular national songs and shouting the usual slogans. We then proceed to the 'Maruthi' temple situated at the other end of the town We offer our prayers there and return. I try to make a few more acquaintances in the town and we get back to the camp. It continues to drizzle.

* * * *

My friends offer some lunch as soon as we return. All of us then run up to the Ashram and spend our time with the Swami talking on all kinds of subjects.

I ask him how he managed to maintain such a perfect body in this malarial region.

"Why, the Yogasanas have helped me do it," he replies "I should be very happy if all of you get some training in this way Even a thin man can take to it and get quite strong A man who has attained mastery in this art, can easily defy a wild elephant"

He is not satisfied with mere talk

"Come along, we shall begin our first lesson straight off" We take to this exercise eagerly and spend a good half-hour at it under his guidance

We are then taken round the garden He plucks a nice water-melon and offers it to us We make short work of it in no time

* * * *

The drizzling has now stopped and there is beautiful sunshine inviting us towards the lake We go there and enjoy ourselves in the water till the 'kitchen' calls

* * * *

We have our after-noon *siesta* and then our special tea We should like to do some work to-day. I request my friends to go reconnoitring into the villages near by Let them go in two batches and begin some active propaganda at one or two places

* * * *

I go alone into the town One of the gentlemen I had met in the morning appeared to be a little more enthusiastic than the rest I therefore go straight to him He sends for the other leading men We discuss together all possible plans and programmes It turns out that none of them is prepared to court arrest or to go to jail Unfortunately, a big bit of our fight consists of this 'jail' business So, we decide to get through the constructive programme and immediately draft an appeal to be issued to the people at large We can study the reactions of this move and then think of the work lying ahead of us

The meeting over, my friend suggests that I should lodge and board in his house Coming from the camp every now and then would be a difficult task and there would be plenty of work for me to get through I thank him for the offer But at present I do not propose to segregate myself from my friends I must be in touch with their work in the villages Moreover, I am feeling quite happy and at home in our camp

He asks me at least to sup with him To this I consent willingly He is such a nice gentleman, that I cannot displease him

* * * *

On my way back to the camp, I peep in at the Police Inspector's and appraise him of our presence and our proposed activities He need not bother about us for the present, I tell him I shall intimate to him when the proper time comes

* * * *

We exchange notes at the camp and find that my friends have progressed very well Excellent propaganda has been carried on in half-a-dozen villages The villagers have expressed their readiness to join the fight They are bolder and more enthusiastic than the people of the town

While discussing the reasons for the difference in the two attitudes of mind, we come to the following conclusion

what is legitimately due to them. Thus the poor peasant is pinched both ways The remaining population of the town consists of either contractors or merchants who have to depend on the goodwill of the officers, for some favour or the other. Anyway, this makes it clear that we should build up our strength in the villages The poor rustic folk are made of harder stuff. Why, for that matter, they have exhibited their sympathy, even to-day, in a tangible form by the offer of provisions and milk to our friends. They have assured them not to bother about our daily needs at all.

* * * *

As is my wont, I run up to the Ashram. We have become more familiar with each other—the Swamiji and myself. In the course of the talk, I make bold to suggest to him that most of the modern Sadhus are parasites on society. They should, on the other hand, be the guides and guardians of the people. He agrees with me and suggests that it is worth while writing a thesis on the subject.

* * * *

It is past midnight when I return to the camp. All my friends have already gone to bed. Out of consideration for me, they have

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The villagers are the hardest hit in the present scheme of things They have to meet the brunt of the burden of a top-heavy administration and consequently the taxes fall the heaviest on them They know that foreign rule is responsible for all these evils and it is easy for them to appraise our movement at its true value.

On the other hand, most of the town-dwellers are government servants, in other words, they are the agents engaged to exploit the villagers They extract much more than

what is legitimately due to them. Thus the poor peasant is pinched both ways. The remaining population of the town consists of either contractors or merchants who have to depend on the goodwill of the officers, for some favour or the other. Anyway, this makes it clear that we should build up our strength in the villages The poor rustic folk are made of harder stuff Why, for that matter, they have exhibited their sympathy, even to-day, in a tangible form by the offer of provisions and milk to our friends They have assured them not to bother about our daily needs at all

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It is past midnight when I return to the camp All my friends have already gone to bed Out of consideration for me, they have

placed one of the two rooms entirely at my disposal The other room serves the purpose of a kitchen by day and a bed-room by night. There is another portion,—in between the two rooms—which is something like a verandah, opening out in front. For us, it serves the purpose of an office *cum* drawing room But no one can sleep here at night The wind is so severe and cold and if it rains

Anyhow, it is very kind of my friends to have allowed me the room My poor health prompts them, I imagine, to accord me this special treatment. This room, though it is the pick of the lot here, is not habitable under normal conditions To-day, it is worse than usual. It has been drizzling right through and the floor is more than usually damp. There is on wooden plank to spread my bed on. Moreover, the ceiling tiles are old and worn-out Water is drip-drip-dripping at several places I spread my bed somehow and try to rest. But sleep is an impossibility.

I also give the finishing touches to our appeal to the people of the Taluka It takes a definite shape now

* * * *

I look at my watch It is four hours past midnight Everything is still and dark, outside Not a creature stirs The wind is blowing with terrific violence, right into my face The stars above are looking at me—veritable sentinels of the night My sole companion, in this serene and silent hour, is the tiny rill that opens out from the lake and glides past the Ashram with a gurgling sound too soothing for words

I wake up one of my friends and request him not to disturb me for the morning programme

Even the damp floor seems to be quite invit ing now, and I am lost in slumber before long

VII

The Swamiji is more than pleased with the essay on ' Sadhus ' He wants to get it published I know, however, it will not serve any useful purpose, except satisfying an author's vanity

The appeal in its turn, reduces itself into the following ten commandments —

1 You shall join the Prabhat Pheris
2 You shall hoist the national flag on your houses

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Why should I not read or do some writing work? I have been specially provided with a piece of luxury—a lantern I sit up far into the night and produce an essay on Sadhus as suggested by the Swamiji I am glad that it has provided some exercise for my penmanship

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3 You shall spin
4 You shall wear only handmade cloth
5 You shall not don foreign made apparel
6 You shall not use any article of foreign make
7 You shall not consume tea or foreign sugar or cigarettes
8 You merchants shall enforce the boycott of foreign goods
9 You shall not drink
10 You shall enrol yourselves as members of the Congress

* * * *

The draft is despatched immediately to the Headquarters with a request that they should get a large number of copies printed at once No work can be done here before they are received and distributed

* * * *

I have done quite a lot of swimming to day There is some progress in the practice of 'Yoga sanas' The whole of the afternoon is a holiday for us We go about hiking in the forest

VIII

One two three We have been actually counting the number of days and enquiring at

every 'bus that comes from Headquarters But the handbills have not been delivered by the printer

The 'Prabhat Pheri' is no doubt gathering momentum and strength every day It is the only important programme we could think of A large number of elders have also begun to join us We have introduced all the available slogans and songs Even the younger folk have become quite familiar with the vocabulary

* * * *

But the villages have a more hopeful story to tell My friends have shown tremendous progress in their work They have reached the stage of inducing the patels to resign A large number of these patels have sent in their resignations to the mamlatdar

To day, a large number of the patels are expected in a body at our camp They wish to get instructions from us regarding their future work We receive them properly A flag salutation ceremony is specially arranged for, in their honour The national flag has been flying permanently over our camp now But to day, most of the songs are sung in chorus, the volunteers standing at attention We have had a fresh contingent of volunteers despatched from Headquarters and

The meeting is over We notice that some plain clothes men have been watching our activities keenly

IX

Three more days pass without much fuss The printed appeals have not been received even to day We are almost exasperated at the delay

We are having our usual swimming exercises in the lake The sport is particularly enjoyable to day We continue in the water very long Some of my friends have gone to the other bank and returned A crocodile is reported to have made its home here But nothing worries us A new-found freedom seems to have destroyed every fear

* * * *

We are absorbed in our swimming None of us has noticed the arrival of the Police Inspector, who is in deep conversation with our Swamiji Both of them are sitting on a log of wood just on the banks of the lake absorbed in talk

* * * *

Perhaps, the presence of the Police Inspector has attracted their attention Otherwise, why should the schoolmaster s people come out in a body? Maybe, they are watching our sport The

all of them look smart and bright in their uniforms and create an impression of discipline and strength in our ranks The villagers are impressed and feel that they can depend on us We give them talks on various important matters

What should we do if any of the patels withdraw their resignations and turn out to be black legs? '

"We should enforce a social boycott on such a person This is the easiest way of bringing him round If he repents, we should ask him to pay a fee to the Congress by way of fine and allow him to join our ranks" This is the suggestion from one of the brother patels We do not hazard any proposal We wholeheartedly endorse their formula

At the end, we appeal to the villagers to join us in larger numbers and to help us in our work When they co operate with us, it will be an easy matter for us to face the enemy It is in the villages that our main strength lies Of course, we are not going to launch any mass action for some time to come But in the meanwhile, the villagers should spread our message in the interior They may not expect us to cover the whole ground in this inaccessible region

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family consists of six souls in all There are the two parents three kids and an elderly girl The latter is married, it appears, to a vagabond of a husband The poor girl does not want to live with him She is keeping on at her father's house under protest

But how long can she remain like this? She must get on somehow with the man to whom she has been united in solemn wedlock Society requires it And the law allows it

It is very strange that my thoughts suddenly go back to my only sister, who is no more She was just a stripling of a girl—about nine—when the cruel hands of death snatched her away from us She was a little younger than I Had she lived, she might have been of the same age as the schoolmaster's daughter standing there And got married too by now! Just imagine her having had a rogue of a husband like this! Is n't it much better that death saved her from the ordeal? But can I ever get my lost sister again? How tender and affectionate she was? We had not quarelled with each other even for a single day, as brothers and sisters often do

* * * *

We gather from the Swamiji that one of the patels had really turned out to be a black leg He

had not resigned and had complained to the Police Inspector regarding us volunteers and our interference with the villagers He had also intimated the fact to the District Magistrate. The Inspector had therefore come to acquaint us with the situation He was proceeding to the District Headquarters for instructions By himself, he did not wish to interfere with our work. Duty demanded his taking an initiative in the matter now.

X

It is about a fortnight since the work was commenced here. It is twelve days since I came to the place. But no substantial work has been done We have not been able to push through the constructive programme even Why bother about any aggressive campaign?

To-morrow the whole country is going to celebrate the birthday of our great leader. Why not whip up some enthusiasm in this town by taking advantage of this occasion?

When we are fixing up the programme for to-morrow's function at the camp, a policeman in uniform calls on us He presents a notice to us and takes our signatures for having served it on us. The notice issued by the District Magistrate requires us to remove ourselves from the

limits of the District within twenty-four hours. We decide to defy the notice and to court arrest To-morrow's programme must be gone through anyhow

* * * *

The celebration begins with the hoisting of the flag in the morning

"Zanda Uncha Rahe Hamara!"

(Let our flag fly high!)

The chorus is caught up by a hundred voices present and the tunes rise into the morning air thrilling every one of us The flag-post is put up at an important place in the town The national tri-colour appears bright and inspiring against the background of the luminous sky. In pursuance of our wishes, a large number of people have hoisted flags on their house-tops There is the usual volunteers' parade—now a large number of local boys have recruited themselves— the receiving of the salute and speech-making

* * * *

The evening function consists of a procession in the town, with a picture of the leader in front A large number of citizens accompany the party, joining in our songs and the shouting of slogans To-day, everyone is highly jubilant The procession covers the whole town and terminates at the

temple, where a meeting has been called for A good number of ladies have also assembled here We are just getting ready to address the gathering, when a policeman interrupts us

"You are wanted by the Magistrate for a few minutes"

"What for?"

"You can have a talk with him and come back"

"Please tell him that we shall be there straight now"

We speak to the people about the life and work of our great leader We also tell them that our work here is at an end and that we shall be clapped into prison very soon But they must not lose heart Let the movement be carried on as vigorously as possible The new method of fighting devised by our leader, does not require any commander or any organisation It is a unique experiment in the annals of resistance to force Every man is himself the General as well as the soldier Faith in our cause and sincerity of purpose are the two qualifications needed The rest of the fight will take care of itself

We are glad that we have had our say and to a representative gathering like this All classes

of people have taken part in to day's function without any desire to keep in the background

* * * *

The meeting is dissolved and every one is moving homewards Our friend, the policeman, has come back, ready to escort us to the Kaccheri

The Police Inspector and the Magistrate have been waiting for us We are received courteously enough and offered seats

"You hava defied the order served on you, and you should be bound over at once," say they "We do not see why you should court arrest unnecessarily What useful purpose is going to be served by rotting in the prison? We would even now suggest your going away from here and avoiding the consequences Why should you waste your energies at a place like this, where no progress is possible?"

We cannot say whether the advice has been proffered in our interests or in those of the Government It is very likely that the District Prison is overcrowded and the authorities are trying to avoid fresh contingents They would like to get us out of the way as summarily as possible Otherwise, there is no explanation for enforcing on us a law which is usually intended for criminal tribes, thieves and vagabonds The

section is styled as 46, District Police Act, which cannot be applied to our work by any stretch of imagination

We have, on our part, decided to court arrest and to get into prison If we acted otherwise, it would create an unhealthy atmosphere The people would surely accuse us of cowardice, and, we being the first batch, should not set a bad example.

We therefore thankfully decline the offer of the officers and get into the lock-up immediately.—a fitting consummation to the day's activities, and a tribute to the life and work of the great man whose birthday we have just celebrated

XI

A single night spent in a Taluka lock-up is not a very trying experience, especially when there are half-a-dozen friends sharing the discomfort But the atmosphere of locked doors, iron bars, and narrow and ill-ventilated rooms has already begun to creep over us

* * * *

The next morning, the Magistrate appears at the office as usual. He is good enough to make kind enquiries about us. We request him to finish up our trial quickly. He agrees.

If we only put up a strong defence, we can easily extricate ourselves There is not a shred of evidence against us But why should we complicate matters? We are sure to be clapped into prison some day, somhow The sooner the better

* * * *

Let us now adjourn to the court-hall, my friends You can take your seat comfortably, Your Honour And you, Mr. Inspector! You can begin your tale, straightaway.

Thank you very much, Your Honour. You do not feel the need for our getting into the witness box. You think that we might answer right from our seats

May we request you to dispense with this armed guard? Where is the need for any show of strength, when we have surrendered ourselves so completely into your hands?

Yes. We shall speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Did you say God? Yes In the name of that Supreme Being, who is sitting in judgment over all of us, we shall speak the truth.

Any defence?

No, no, no Absolutely none. We have placed a blank cheque in your hands, Your

Honour You may pronounce the sentence with an easy conscience

Six months R I Is that all? Thank you very much for your consideration, Your Honour You have been very kind to us, indeed!

* * * *

From this moment onwards, we need not bother about our bodily needs We have delivered the goods as they say, and the authorities are now our guides and guardians

At about 4 p m we are led out from the lock up A bus is ready waiting for us at the gate What a huge crowd has already gathered here to give us a send off! How touching and tender are the demonstrations of these simple and innocent folk? What with the garlanding, the touching of our feet and the joyous cries of victory, we are almost bewildered and perplexed We wish to speak a few words of thanks from inside the 'bus But we are overcome by emotion and our lips refuse to move

XII

The 'bus moves on It stops near our camp, without our asking for the concession The Policemen have already taken the brief for us

"Good-bye Swamiji, good-bye master, good-bye dear Ashram, and good-bye to you our beautiful lake"

"Adieu, my volunteer friends Please report the matter to the Headquarters early, and carry on the work as usual, until you get further instructions No doubt, you may also have to follow suit soon"

After these parting instructions and leave-taking we move on further I also take care to hand over my watch and the extra clothes to my friends at the camp I keep some clothes with me for use in prison And a few good books too

* * * *

We are now passing through a beautiful countryside, rich with the forest trees and luxuriant foliage The fact that we are prisoners does not take away from us the right to enjoy the beauties of nature Our minds are still our cherished possession. Had we been allowed to stay longer, we could have persuaded the people to break the forest laws, thus establishing our supremacy over this domain!

But that was not to be.

* * * *

It is about sunset and we are now nearing our destination—a charming coastal town The light green of the sea has blended itself harmoniously with the bright blue of the sky and has produced that lovely azure in the far horizon It looks as though the sky and the sea are making love to each other And just behind this strange love-tryst, you see the sun, "Broad, red, radiant, half-reclined" going down unwillingly to rest. Does he imagine that he is the sole witness to this glorious consummation of his day's endeavours?

You can also look on a little longer, my friends You shall have no such chance for six months more See those hillocks, yonder, projecting out of the sea, and stretching their hands of welcome to us! Yes This is the same scene which our poet has painted so exquisitely in one of his works Let us explore these regions at leisure, after we come out of prison Now, the prison doors seem to be beckoning to us to make haste

CHAPTER IV

Camp No 3—THE JAIL

The mantle of darkness has already fallen over the earth and here we are, at last, in Jail—the goal of our endeavours and the rendezvous of all the political workers of the district How is it that my heart flutters at the sight of these ominous gates? Jail and jail going have become such matters of course, and yet a strange feeling has overtaken me! Maybe it is because this is my first visit to the place

"Wait a minute, friends You cannot go straight-way into the prison like that,"—that is the Jailor asking us to stop

This is the Jail office Here all our belongings are scrutinised and our names are registered in the books Each of us gets a number Mine goes above 3,000 Luckily we are allowed our own clothes We need not don that awkward Jail uniform, This is a great relief to me The biggest bit of luck is yet in store for me! All the books (half dozen) I have brought with me are 'passed'!

These preliminaries are over, and you hear the clicking of the big key in the lock and lo! the portentous gates of the K District Prison

are *flung open* and we make our solemn entry inside We are subjected to a further examination here This time the scrutiny is more thorough and more exhaustive There is a close search of our persons and the Jamadar makes sure that we have not been carrying anything objectionable with us

* * * *

"*Are Bapre!* You here "—that is my friend of the previous camp, greeting me affectionately

"How many months?"

"Six"

"*Is that all?* You are a lucky chap"

He has been sentenced, on the other hand, to two years

"Hullo! Mr M Hullo! G " I recognise a number of friends and exchange warm greetings with them

We have now been safely installed in one of the 'burraqs'—a hybridised form of 'barrack' And this 'burraq' is a long, gabled structure with a shabby mud floor There are, lodged here already, a hundred and odd people belonging to our fraternity They have arranged their beds, in three long rows Some of them are sitting, some holding discussions and a few already gone to sleep

As soon as we enter, we are bombarded with a number of questions regarding the position of the fight outside This, added to the mutual exchange of greetings, takes about an hour and it is nearly 9 p m now The old prisoners are getting ready to say their common prayer, before going to bed

"What about our food?"—we ask them, as the stomach has begun to pinch

"So you have not had your food in the evening," they ask us, a little surprised "But, don't imagine that you can get anything now, at this late hour At 5 p m we get our food and before it is six, we shall be safely barred and bolted behind these iron doors"

One of the old hands, seeing our plight, produces from under his bed a piece of Jowari bread I snap a few bites out of it, but, my God! it is half-baked and such rotten stuff, that I cannot eat any more I gulp a tumbler of water instead—and off we go to bed

* * * *

It is past midnight and all the prisoners are fast asleep Suddenly a strange noise disturbs me

"All-bale—all-bale—all-bale" The original voice is caught up and echoed by a second voice

and then a third, till it seems to go right round the prison

The morning's enquiry proves that it is the warders crying out "All well" to each other

II

"Get up, I say Get ready for coffee" It is one of my friends waking me up The other prisoners have lined up together in the verandah in front of the barrack, with cups in their hands I am still feeling sleepy, but the sound of 'coffee' has pricked my ears and I get ready without more ado

This is the first morning in prison, and I must not miss any of my claims and privileges here owing to any carelessness on my part Most of all, I should not miss the morning coffee, which is a veritable god send Yes The man is coming there with a big vessel in his hand He is pourring out the hot fluid into the cups of each of the prisoners, who are gulping it with great relish Now, the server has come very near me I hold my cup in readiness Yes It is my turn now 'Thank you, my friend That will do for me'

"Do you wish to have a little milk or sugar, or decoction? How does the coffee taste?"—that is my neighbour making kind enquiries of me

I lift the cup to my lips and taste a little of this Jail coffee and, my gracious! it is as different from coffee as an ant is from an elephant This is nothing but rice 'kanji' prepared in such an awful fashion!

* * * *

After sometime, all of us, newcomers, are produced before the doctor He makes a number of entries regarding our height, weight, general health, etc The weighing machine registers 96 lbs against me, and, the doctor himself is not satisfied with the condition of my health "No, no You cannot be put to any hard labour, though the sentence says R I You can give him some simple work, Jailor"

Why should I worry, when the doctor himself has taken up the brief for me? I gather from friends that this simple labour consists of palm-matting, cleaning the grain and such like There are large groves of coconut palms on the sea shore Finding that there are a number of prisoners, without much work to engage them in, the Jailor has devised this palm matting business The old hands whisper to me that we could spend the time jolly well with this kind of work

* * * *

Luckily, we are allowed to bathe every day There is a big well from which water can be

pumped into a big tank We go in batches and take our bath in the open air One set goes on pumping water, while the others finish their bath There is no restriction on the use of water, for it is we prisoners who pump out the water Anyhow, this is a great blessing here, for the days are very sultry and we sweat horribly One can indulge in this luxury of bathing in cold water as often as one pleases It is so refreshing!

* * * *

The noon meal is served soon after the bath We carry our plates and sit in long rows in the verandah attached to each of our barracks, and there are eight of these barracks in all The servers come at last First, they deposit a big compressed mass of rice in each plate and pass on After sometime, another set of servers turn up They ladle out some curry into each plate by turn There is a mechanical touch in everything here—even in the doling out of food The human touch is deliberately avoided

The items of menu—there are only two—are given strange names The mass of rice is called 'Pinda' There are two varieties of the curry—Thikki and Pikki The first contains an enormous quantity of chilly and spices and the other is absolutely devoid of such seasoning

But both of them lack the most important item—salt. There might be just a sprinkling of it, but the tongue does not seem to react to this homeopathic quantity. Maybe, the authorities have devised this new way of paying off their scores against us, who have stubbornly resisted the tax on this indispensable element of food. Or, as is more likely, the Jail Manual has fixed the quantity of salt to be issued to prisoners. However, this is an eye-opener to us, and we are now able to appraise the correct value of this cheap stuff in its utter absence. We realise that a pinch of salt must mean much to the poor folk even as the lack of it means so much to us here, in prison.

Just imagine an ancestor descending from heaven into our midst and seeing me in this plight!

Why go so far as the ancestors? Even if our castemen at home should come to know of this, I may be ostracised socially. They may ask me to perform 'Prayaschittam' and persecute me in so many other ways. So far as these people go, I shall invent a nice story and keep them off the track. I shall tell them that an orthodox Brahmin cook was engaged specially for us.

How about Mother? She is highly punctilious in her religious observances and she may shudder at this blasphemous and outrageous transgression of our 'religion.' No, no, no. I need not bother myself on that score. She is sure to accept her prodigal son on his own terms, even though he returned to her a vagabond. Yes—a vagabond! She is a mother, after all.

* * * *

"I say, *do we get any more items? Or does* the chapter close here with this Thikki and Pikki?" I ask a neighbour in despair.

"Oh, no! Please wait. They will serve some butter-milk presently."

The morning's experience has put me on my guard. I therefore take the friend's words with

a pinch of salt. And so it turns out in the end We get very 'bitter' milk for all the hoping and waiting

III

This is my third day in prison and I have not touched a morsel of food since coming here. Yesterday, I passed in front of the kitchen—how could one avoid it, when it is located right in the centre of the barracks, which actualy converge at this place?—and observed a capacious animal, the cook, sweating profusely at work. He is also one of the prisoners, who has been drafted on to this department, on account of his powerful physique. And he is a true born 'pariah' by caste. The operations in the kitchen—those huge heaps of rice and the enormous quantities of Thikki and Pikki being prepared on a factory scale—hāve confirmed my worst fears regarding the hygienic condition of the food that is provided It was also reported that a big cockroach was found in the curry the other day! I have therefore made up my mind not to touch this boiled stuff, come what might.

* * * *

There was an important change this morning. Our batch was removed from the common barrack to individual cells. It is a great relief

to me I can enjoy some peace and quiet, which I badly need The group life has already got on my nerves 'Privacy' was unknown all these days When you go to bed, when you bathe, when you take your meal and even when you go to the latrine pole, there are a hundred pairs of eyes watching you Add to this the endless and meaningless clatter of a hundred prisoners, it is very hard to remain in peace The removal to the cell comes, therefore, as a much needed relief I can, at least, hold a book in my hands or go on meditating peacefully and try to solve many a problem pertaining to me, pertaining to India or to the whole world

* * * *

My cell has an additional attraction, besides Right in front of us, there is another cell which is talked of much Here is the famous 'Bengalee Babu' lodged He is one of the so called 'revolutionary' prisoners, hailing from distant Bengal He is lodged alone in this cell He cannot move about freely as we do, as he belongs to the cult of the bomb

Naturally, my curiosity is roused and I feel that I must get into touch with him somehow, anyhow Is he not, after all, impelled by the same generous impulses? Maybe, he is a little

misled from our standpoint—that is all. Does it mean that we should shun him, despise him and keep him at arm's length as the others do?

So, the first thing is to play truant to my legitimate morning duty—not a big sin, though. There are already twenty men drafted on to this palm-matting work and half the number will always be idle It is not a beneficial piece of work, either When these palm mats are ready and dried up, they will be consumed in a single gulp at the Jailor's kitchen. Is it not infinitely more useful—both for my body and my soul—to get to understand a noble soul in agony? If I am able to speak to my friend there, I shall be so happy.

* * * *

I dare not go all at once to him. He is now at work, in the verandah outside his cell He appears to be a good hand at the 'cane.' There are two beautiful 'rattan' chairs by his side, just waiting for some finishing touches. He is now busy with the third

I proceed a little further and clamber up slowly to the verandah. I stand there, watching him at work How can I talk to him all at once?

Any warder passing that way, might object and both of us might get into trouble. It is better to remain silent and take my chance.

For aught I see, he is still a young man—about twenty, at the most. There is a calm and sober and pensive look about him. I for one, am unable to trace the least bit of the 'revolutionary' either in his looks or in his demeanour. Or, is it that a mighty volcano has been suppressed under those calm blue eyes, ready to explode at the shortest notice? Be that as it may, I am sure that no bomb will be thrown at me, at any rate.

He is quite busy with his work and does not seem to take any notice of my presence. A few minutes pass like this in silence. Then he looks up at me and notices that I am interested in him. Otherwise, why should I stand there so long, without going to work? There is silence again for sometime.

"Are you not from the batch of six, who arrived three days ago?"—he breaks the ice at last.

"Yes." So he knows about us.

"How many months are you in for?" he asks me.

"Six months."

"You are a lucky chap, then."

"I should think so."

"Which place do you hail from?"

"So and so.. .. "

Thank God! He has made matters easy for me and now I can freely ask him any question I please.

"*I say, are you allowed to talk to us?*"—I wish to make myself sure on this point.

"Strictly speaking, no. But the warders have full confidence in me and there won't be any surveillance."

"Have you spoken to any of the other political prisoners, besides me?"

"Not much. But I try to keep myself aloof, as a rule. I do not thrust myself on others."

"What is the period of your imprisonment?"

"Twenty years."

I do some arithmetic in my mind. Two hundred and forty months or seven thousand and three hundred days.

"My God! How long is it since you came here?"

"Four years."

"Where were you lodged before?"

"Alipur Central Jail, near Calcutta."

"Why were you shifted from there?"

"You see, we were a dozen people involved in the famous.....bomb case. Two of the party were sentenced to death and subsequently hanged. The rest of us got four years each and lodged in the Alipur Central Jail. It was reported that the Superintendent of this Jail was roughly

handled by one of the prisoners We were suspected of this also Thinking that we would be out for further mischief if we remained together at one place, we were removed to several prisons all over India besides getting an additional sixteen years into the bargain "

I reflect that it is my good fortune that my friend was sent here Otherwise, how could I get into touch with him—a revolutionary?

"Don't you find it very lonely here? None of your friends could meet you, nor any relatives "

"Yes It is really terrible But after the inauguration of the new movement, a number of political prisoners are coming in This has considerably relieved my depression and put some new life and hope into me "

* * * *

"Ding—dong—Ding—dong"—that is the Jail bell calling on the prisoners to stop work All my fellow-prisoners are returning from their task and I wish to join them at the bath

So, I take leave of my friend

"Please call on me, whenever you are free," he says

"By all means "

I am now elated at my progress with the Babu friend It will be a simple affair hereafter

IV

There is a reshuffling of our duties to-day Our palm-matting group is asked to clean rice and *dal* and wheat and to make them ready for the kitchen We all sit in the verandah attached to the Jail store-room Heaps of grain are lying before us and we are expected to remove the dirt and to pick out tiny pebbles that are found in plenty We can easily understand from our job why our 'Pinda' is so bad It is the famous Rangoon rice—an altogether substitute stuff—that has been stocked It has begun ageing and one can discern the common zoological specimens therein The same story with the *dal.*

"I cannot see why such rotten stuff is provided to us Why should we not protest?" asks one.

"The Jail Manual has specified the quality of food that should be provided for the prisoners The principle underlying the prison rules is that we should be tortured as much as possible," remarks another.

"No, I say It is nothing of the kind The Jail people who are in charge of the buying are responsible for it. They talk it over with the grain merchant, and make for themselves a decent margin," explains a third man.

"Yes You are perfectly right The Jailor and the merchant grow a tummy and dysentery dissolves our bowels"—It is I who put a stop to the discussion

The rice and *dal* we have been cleaning is intended for our own consumption The wheat is meant for the A and B class prisoners But we cannot grudge the work on that account? Many of my friends have begun to munch the grains of raw wheat, with great relish. I am also tempted to join them. For one thing, I have not eaten any food since coming here. I am feeling so awfully hungry. This provides some exercise for the teeth and the tongue which have been starved. Let the alimentary canal get into some working order, at least The raw grain tastes much better than that confounded 'Pinda.'

It is a pity that we cannot swallow much of this stuff. A definite quantity has been measured out to us and we might have to answer for the missing stock.

I say, what a funny creature is man!

At home, they used to exercise the strictest guard over the maid-servants lest the poor women should pilfer any grain But here, we are forced to commit the self-same offence with impunity.

How true it is that man is, after all, a creature of circumstance?

But speaking for myself, there is nothing wrong in it, for, this is simply a legitimate and a very poor compensation for the three days' fast.

* * * *

The morning's task is over and we are off to our bath. After this, the others hurry up for the meal. I repair to Babuji's room instead

"Have you finished your meal so quick?"—he asks.

"No, I do not relish that stuff."

"How have you been getting on, these days?"

"As best I could."—I recount to him the morning's experience.

"You are a funny chap, I say. You never told me about this yesterday"

He pauses awhile and continues. "What a pity! I have also just finished my meal. Otherwise, you could have shared it with me. I get my portion of the food straight to my room. Never mind. Please wait," says he and strides along.

When I entered the room, my friend was busy with a water-colour painting. I keep myself engaged in appreciating his artistic talent.

He returns in a few minutes with a 'chappati' and some baked potatoes, wrapped up in a piece of paper.

This is served out to me in a plate and I consume it with great relish I am more than satisfied and thank my friend for the good turn. He also feels very happy.

"From to-day you must share my meal with me. We shall partake of the food, together"—he says.

I am highly grateful for the invitation

"But if the Jailor or warders come to know of it, there might be trouble"—I express my fears

"Don't you worry about it It is none of your concern."

I am thus silenced. It appears that he is in the good books of the warders and the Jamadar, who would not tease him without good reason. Even now, I am told, he had used his good offices to procure the food—indeed a windfall to me

So, this is the wonderful revolutionary prisoner, whom none dared approach Is it not worth one's while cultivating this man's acquaintance?

"You seem to have great talents as an artist," I tell him, pointing at the water-colour painting in front.

"Somewhat But I made it my hobby after coming here I am a self-made artist, besides. Moreover, this gives me much relief. Otherwise, it is very hard to drag on this miserable and *monotonous life for years together*"

I am touched by his reference to his sad and desperate plight. I have been wondering how I could get on for a period of six months and here is a young man, practically of the same age as myself, who has to spend a whole life-time in this dreary atmosphere.

"I presume, you do a bit of reading as well?"—I wish to change the topic of conversation.

"Yes,"—he replies and produces half-a-dozen good books from under his bedding. He has hidden them away carefully under the mattress, lest the Superintendent should, on his weekly rounds, discover them. Reading is a privilege particularly 'taboo' to the 'bomb' prisoner. More reading means more revolution.

I observe amongst the collection, a copy of 'Gitanjali' in original Bengalee and take it into my hands

"That is my most cherished possession" comments my friend. "And it is indeed a balm to my aching heart."

And what wonder! It is the masterpiece of our great poet, a work which has earned for him

world-wide recognition Moreover, the poet hails from his own province. These song-offerings at the feet of the Lord have secured peace and comfort to innumerable souls. I have, no doubt, read this work as rendered into English by the author himself. All the same, I request my friend to read out some songs to me in the original Bengalee How could any translation, howsoever perfect, convey the beauty, the charm and the irresistible grace of the original work? Anyhow, it is very sad to reflect that this glorious work has not been rendered into my mother tongue, although it is sixteen long years since it received the highest laurel available to a literary production.

My friend has with him some standard works on philosophy, psychology and Art He has managed to get them through the influence of friends. I also promise to lend him all the books I have brought with me There is a pocket edition of the New Testament, the Bhagavadgeeta and a copy of the 'Light of Asia' They are sure to interest my friend.

* * * *

The afternoon is also spent in Babuji's room. Let the palm-matting take care of itself I shall *establish my kinship with the 'revolutionary.'*

For sometime, I sit along with him in the verandah, watching him at work with the cane Whenever the Jailor passes that way, I get into the room and indulge in some reading

V

It is only six in the evening and there is plenty of time for the sun to go down to rest We are already put into our cell and locked up We have to spend twelve long hours here, say, till six in the morning to morrow

Our life inside the jail could be divided into two distinct periods The first is from six o'clock in the morning to six in the evening, during which period we remain outside the cell We need not enter the cell, when once we step out of it Rather, we do not wish to come here in the course of the day

The second part of the day begins from six in the evening We have to remain caged in our cell for full twelve hours In this respect, we even anticipate the Sun God who seeks his rest much later than we do

There is no difficulty in spending the day But the big problem is to go through the twelve long hours during the night Nearly two hours are taken up by the daily prayer and other songs—

national and devotional The prayer is, no doubt, common to all the prisoners This is a legacy which we have brought from our camps into the prison But the other songs are matters of taste and talent This interval is, of course, well spent But after that

You can't do any reading in the dark No lights are provided, for, the Jail rules won't permit that Light is an inflammatory agent and supposing the prisoner should think of putting an end to his life this way, who will be held responsible? The next best thing is to go on talking with your cell mates, until you are tired

Luckily, I have two good companions in my cell One of them comes from my own town and is known to me well So, I am quite free and at home with him His being younger is a distinct advantage in my favour I can get odd bits of service from him For example, it is a regular piece of duty for him now to massage my limbs every day This mode of personal service—though fast going out of fashion—used to be the privilege and prerogative of our elders, who exercised it to the full when we were boys The massage has proved very soothing to my weak and aching limbs I think we derive a sense of relief by this simple process which is conducive to a

uniform circulation of blood in the body, and tones up both muscle and nerve. If I were a physician, I should have expatiated upon its merits, in a more lucid and scientific manner. Anyhow, it is now both a relaxation and an exercise to me And my friend has practically become an adept at the art.

He is a jolly nice fellow, too He is very fond of cutting jokes and has made it a point to trace some element of humour, even in our most casual remarks All of us enjoy the fun and burst into roars of laughter, even when there is the least occasion for it. This jovial spirit is a balm to us here Fun and frolic are the very spice of life But now, they infuse new life and energy into us, and brace us up in these sordid surroundings.

My friend has finished his secondary education 'I did not find much use in progressing with the usual studies,' he tells me. 'I therefore bade good-bye to the academic career. In spite of opposition at home, I have come out to do my

"I don't bother about it at all I am quite confident of earning a decent living somehow"

And he has great regard for me, because, I am much older than he and supposed to be more educated He will bet that I am a wise and learned man Otherwise, how could I use so many big words and high sounding phrases, especially in a foreign language?

"Please coach me up in English I shall be highly grateful to you"—he implores

"*Are, Baba* What a funny fellow you are? We are attempting to get rid of the foreign element—let alone the language—from our country and you wish to waste your time over English In that case, you could easily have pursued your studies"—I argue

"No, no I have absolutely no quarrel with any language, which is after all the vehicle for expressing our thoughts Do you mean to say that we should not imbibe noble thoughts, simply because they are expressed in another language? We should not be slaves and blind imitators of an alien culture—that is all"

It is really creditable that he holds advanced views in the matter

* * * *

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'But what about your future? Will you not be stranded in the struggle for existence? Won't it be a heavy responsibility when you get married?"—I just want to sound him

"I don't bother about it at all. I am quite confident of earning a decent living somehow."

And he has great regard for me, because, I am much older than he and supposed to be more educated He will bet that I am a wise and learned man Otherwise, how could I use so many big words and high-sounding phrases, especially in a foreign language?

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* * * *

I cannot say, how my comrade was addicted to snuff, at this early age But this habit is quite in keeping with his jovial temperament And I for one, would vote in favour of snuffing as against smoking The former is infinitely less harmful and certainly more tolerable, although both of them have the same parent—tobacco

It is, however, very surprising how my friend manages to get this forbidden article into jail Isn't he a very resourceful chap? I am also tempted to take a pinch from him, occasionally While demanding this pleasant stimulant, I use *a very pedantic expression—attributed to no less* a person than Dr Johnson This is just to keep him in good humour but the chap has gone into such raptures over it and has taken the life out of me on that account I had to repeat it a hundred times to enable him to get it by heart

As I have already said, he is infatuated with big words and phrases For instance, there is another highly involved sentence, which also, curiously enough, is supposed to owe its origin to that illustrious person, Dr Johnson My friend has made this also his own, and is never tired of repeating it, in season and out of season When I get out of jail, I wish to verify whether this favourite sentence of his could be traced to

Dr Johnson, either directly or indirectly It runs somewhat in this fashion

"When I was perambulating in the streets of London, I encountered a rustic, whom I interrogated the latitude and longitude of the day On his remaining taciturn, I, with a rotatory motion of my cudgel, converted his perpendicularity into horizontality"

* * * *

I must not forget the best thing about my friend—his strong and robust build He has taken kindly even to these hard conditions of prison life and has put on some weight after coming here And the funniest thing is, that his abdomen has been developing some obesity latterly God knows from what portion of the food he derives the fatty material But I know for a fact that he bangs away the full block of rice that is allowed him And on particular occasions when he has sweated hard at work—unlike me, he is given very hard labour,—he asks me to sit by his side at meal time I have to pass on my portion of the food to him, for, we are not allowed more than the scheduled rations, and I do not need it myself

So that is my friend, whose 'parts' are many and varied He is now sleeping soundly by my

side Nothing in the world worries him "Sleep on, my friend, sleep on How I wish I had half your strength and health!"

* * * *

The other friend, who makes up the trinity in our cell, is an equally nice chap He has earned the curious nickname of 'Christian' Rao from his school fellows He is a first rate Hindu and a full blooded Brahmin, to boot But he used to move freely with his Christian friends in utter disregard of his Hindu or Moslem friends at school And it is such an easy matter to get a *sobriquet* from the boys, who will be on the look-out for a chance of this description This friend was also one of my co workers at camp and did very good work

We are therefore a happy lot in here, and this happy companionship makes up for our wants and worries in the Jail

I ardently wish that my two friends are not taken away from me during my stay here Even after we get out, I shall have them as my lieute nants in case the fight has to be pursued

Here is solid good material for our army!

VI

My two chums in exile usually go to bed much earlier than I—soon after saying the common

prayers, say, about nine in the night I do not get sleep so soon, partly because I have become very weak on account of the hard conditions of living both at the previous camp and here in Jail I therefore go on brooding far into the night Especially to day, I am in a very pensive mood

If I am only allowed the luxury, I should like to have a stroll in the beautiful moonlight, which is so inviting But that is impossible Sleep, I can't get so soon So I hold on to the iron bars of my cell door and go on looking at the moon She rouses very pleasant recollections in my mind, soft and tender thoughts rendered sorrowful by contrast with the present conditions For instance, my tongue wishes to go astray and dreams of all sorts of delicacies, known and unknown It has been so starved all these days that it pictures all sorts of dishes—*Dosais, Idlies, Badam Halva* and fruits of various kinds—apple, orange, bananas, pine apple It looks as though ages have elapsed since I had a dose of coffee Of course there is the wonderful substitute for it—the morning 'Kanji' Can I really get these things once again? At the previous camp, we led such rigorous and ascetic existence that even the ordinary dishes appear to be receding far into the background Let alone other things,

it is so hard to get a pinch of salt here and I am naively dreaming of Badam Halva! Give up all those fads, my friend

* * * *

Somehow, in spite of myself, my thoughts now run back to my mother and brother at home All these days I had forgotten everything about them In fact, I have not intimated to my mother, about my arrest and conviction I do not wish to tell her that I am in Jail This will upset her and she will begin to fast Even while I was at large she used to lead a hard life But she will have come to know of it, through the papers There is no doubt that she will be needlessly starving and in deep grief on my account

When I left them last, they were in dire need Would they not be much worse off now? And that house, in which they used to live! It is better not to think of it No doubt, the latrine block is quite close to our cell here But it is certainly better than those squalid and dismal surroundings I hope they have been able to change their dwelling by now

"My boy, how can you face the rigours of Jail life?"

Mother dear, your words seem to be still ringing in my ears But I do not see why you

We must report ourselves to the doctor, to day Our weights are noted down again and entered in our cards Each of us is provided with a progress card, just as they do in hospitals This contains a report of our health I have lost six pounds after my arrival It is an alarming reduction no doubt I am advised to go *to the hospital But I do not wish to enter a* prison within the prison If you go there you cannot move about so freely

* * * *

The Jail barber is also at your service to day There is a shed near the bathing tank, set apart for this purpose I desire to have my hair cut But when I go to the place and observe the operations of the tonsorial artist, I am rather horrified He is not permitted to use the hair-cutting machine or scissors He applies the razor straight off and shaves close to the skin just as country barbers do You could notice a few cuts on the scalp on one or two heads I make up my mind not to hand over my head to his tender mercies And he is not to blame either Again, it is a question of those wretched Jail rules

* * * *

Another important feature of the day is the change of menu provided for us Each prisoner

is allowed some quantity of jaggery with the food You could eat it away separately, as some do, or along with the rice An additional item on the list is 'Jowari bread' Those who want it can have it in preference to rice That means that you could choose the lesser of the two evils– either rice with worms and insects or jowary bread with tiny pebbles and mud wrought into its texture and admittedly half baked, too!

Luckily, I stand on a different footing al together, in the matter of food From to day, I shall be the guest of my friend, the Bengalee Babu He tells me that this will be the first time after many years, that he would share his meal in common with a friend Friend! What an en dearing term! How many years have elapsed since he addressed any one by that sweet name!

At meal time, I receive my share of jaggery and jowary bread and hand it over to my cell mate and then repair to the room of the 'bomb' prisoner

He has been waiting for me as a good host should Moreover, he has dressed a special dish for me The 'chappati' has been cut into pieces, a little cocoanut oil and some jaggery added on to it and the whole thing mixed up to a special consistency I had first imagined that it would

not taste well enough But good gracious! it is so delicious indeed There is rice and curry if I want My friend has managed to get a little salt too We both eat out of the same plate—my friend is very particular about it—and he looks so pleased and happy

After the orthodox meal is over, the Babu produces a packet from his cupboard The wrapper is removed and I behold some yellow stuff inside I have been wondering what that might be

'No bomb, please'—he assures me and offers some of it to me to eat He also partakes of it

"Where the dickens did you get it from?" I exclaim after tasting it a bit It is pucca Badam Halva! What a strange coincidence? It was only yesternight that I was hankering after this delicacy and here it is ready for me to day Did my friend read my mind and provide for it now? No One of the "B" class prisoners had sent it to him as a Sunday present and he has kindly preserved it for my reception

"Babuji, why are you so particular about our eating from the same plate?"—I ask him

"You see, that is how we used to eat when we were apprenticing as revolutionaries Even four or five of us would sit together and partake

of the simple food It was one of the modes of demonstrating the spirit of comradeship"

This leads on to another question

"What exactly was the work you were expected to do as a revolutionary?"

I am told in reply, that there was a secret organisation of the type Any one, who joined it—of course, members would be selected after the closest scrutiny—must undergo a very hard disciplinary course The period of probation was very long and trying You would be admitted into the fold after passing severe tests of hard ship and suffering

'What about the actual 'Bomb' business? Have you personally joined any party attempting the life of someone?"

"No, I had not yet reached that stage You cannot join the inner circle unless you pass through the probationary course, successfully"

"At least, do you know the formula for preparing a bomb"

"Only as much as you do"—he replies and relates to me a funny story in this connection

After coming to this jail, the warders and constables were worrying him to prepare a 'bomb' as an experiment They would not believe him,

if he said he did not know. At last, he was so put out that he wanted to teach them a lesson. 'All right' he said and asked them to bring some ice and milk and sugar from the bazaar. He pretended to be very busy with these things at the fire and others were patiently waiting all along. He succeeded in preparing some ice-cream, which he distributed amongst them and they were all blinking

"This is the bomb, I know" he said and silenced them After this incident, they never used to worry him.

"What was your age, when you joined the group?"—I continue my enquiries.

"Just fifteen or sixteen I was still at school and was introduced to the group by a common friend"

"Do you believe in the cult of the bomb? Do you think it would win us our freedom?"

"I used to once But my ideas have undergone a complete revolution, and now I realise that the present peaceful and non-violent method is the best suited for our country."

"Did you not consult any of your elders, before you took a final decision?"

"I did and all my well-wishers desired that I should resist the temptation. But my enthusiasm

got the better of my wisdom and I was led away in this direction "

" And you have been paying the penalty for all that "—I add " How distressing and painful it is to reflect that an innocent young man like you should rot here in jail and that in the prime of your manhood ? "

VIII

There will be an important innovation in our routine from to day and we are all happy over the change Till now, we had to use the latrine poles which were so close to our barracks There was no privacy and it was highly insanitary We made a joint representation in the matter to the Superintendent, who has permitted us to go out into the open, outside the premises of the jail, for about half an hour each morning We go out in batches of forty to fifty at a time Only one or two constables would follow us They would just make a pretence of counting us while going out They know full well that none of us would give them the slip

Anyhow, this concession is really a tangible one One can spend a good half-hour in the early morning in an atmosphere of complete freedom We can get a glimpse of the blue sea

yonder and the cocoanut palms stretching their arms into the sky as though they were trying to reach the Infinite! Thank God! This morning outing will be a regular feature hereafter and we are so bored having to spend all the twentyfour hours inside the four walls of the prison We can now perceive by contrast the sweetness of freedom and the charm of the open air—just for *half an hour though it be How I wish my* Babuji friend was allowed even this bit of luxury!

I notice that some of my friends have been plucking tender chillies from the plants near by They say it would give great relish to eat them along with the food Poor fellows! They need a change

* * * *

There is no work for us to day The stock of cocoanut branches is exhausted and we have cleaned more than the necessary quantity of rice and dal So, the jailors give us a free hand "You may while away the time anyhow But pretend to be busy when the Superintendent comes" This is more than we had bargained for and we disperse in different directions

I wish to make good use of this opportunity and go on a round of inspection I am anxious to know what is meant by hard labour First, I

go to the '*Chakki*' department This is the place where wheat and jowari are ground in a huge grinding mill It is a big stone mill and four strong men are needed to work it with difficulty I try the experiment and find that I am not equal to it I spend some time there trying to keep my friends in good humour "This is all the result of your *Karma* Had you helped your mother and sister at their work, you would not have received this punishment" I tell them

I am offered some raw wheat flour which I consume gladly It is ages since I had some breakfast Why miss it, when there is a good chance?

Another department of work is gardening The jail garden is outside the premises of the jail I join the party, as it offers me a chance of going out, for the second time in the course of the day Most of the prisoners in this group belong to this town Their friends who are at large, come and meet them here by previous appointment They have brought lunch for their friends, and the friends offer a little to me More than the lunch and sweets, there is plenty of news from outside, gathered here and in due course it spreads into the jail To day we come to know that there are rumours of a settlement

and that the fight would be called off and that all the prisoners would be set free etc etc

* * * *

Now I stroll into the worst department coming under the category of hard laour, viz the stone breaking section There are a large number of prisoners put on to this work They have to break big sized stones into road metal used for macadamizing roads It is indeed a trying job and you have to finish a given quantity during the specified time I also try it for a while and give it up in despair

There is another section here, which is engaged in transporting the finished metal outside the premises of the jail This job offers one an opportunity of going outside and so I readily transfer my services to this group

* * * *

To day happens to be the Visitors' day That is why you see those half a dozen gentlemen going round the jail There is a lady also in the party She is perhaps the wife of the European officer, by her side

Those people—there are some official and non official members in the party—are expected to enquire and to set right the grievances of the prisoners This is only an ostensible object, for,

they never listen to our complaints On the contrary, every time they come and go out, more restrictions are imposed upon us and they make sure that the mailed fist of law and order is maintained intact

They have just come to the stone breaking section They are moving along But the lady has paused awhile and is talking to a young man who appears to be tired of his work He is sweating from head to foot and the midday sun is blazing severely and mercilessly overhead The lady holds her umbrella over him and speaks a few kind words to him

The officer sees this and comes back to her He takes her away from the prisoner She is rebuked severely for her goodness "You have no business to evince sympathy in that way Let them suffer—the dogs They deserve this'

The poor lady is very much hurt But what can she do?

IX

The dull, monotonous routine of Jail life goes on in much the same fashion from day to day and from week to week with the endless repetition of Thikki and Pikki and Pinda We are a little excited now and then with the news that filters inside—the arrest of a leader here

and a leader there More than these reports of the fight outside, the brutality and wickedness of the police who beat and ill treat the prisoners even inside the jails, are heart rending The prisoners are assaulted and indignities are heaped on these brave souls merely because they dare to ask for some concessions with regard to their food and other needs It is really surprising how we have escaped such humiliations in our jail

Another feature that offers some excitement to us inside is the coming in and going out of different batches of prisoners More than a dozen such entries and exits have taken place after my arrival In one of these groups, my engineer friend came and joined us This gave me great pleasure, for, we had not stayed together in the same place after starting from home He was drafted to a different camp Now, he has also been sentenced for six months and for the same offence as mine Anyway, I can enjoy his company till I get out of jail

A very funny thing has happened here, and it has opend my eyes somewhat One of our fellow convicts, a boy of fourteen, has repeated his pilgrimage into jail for the third time in succession He would be punished for a period of a week or so for some offence and he would

court arrest immediately he was released On asking the boy for the reason, we are told that he prefers the jail to his home Theirs is a large and poor family and sheer poverty has compelled three of the elderly brothers to seek the jail as a means of livelihood! Our young friend is a smart chap no doubt, but his father could not give him any schooling so far He frankly confessed to me that here in jail he could at least get some food—good, bad or indifferent But at home, it was hard to get even that

This is very pathetic indeed But worse instances had come to our notice while in camp Some of the villagers could not dream of any food whatever for days on end On such occasions, they would collect the bark of a certain tree, dry it in the sun and pound it well They would bake 'rotis' from the flour thus obtained!

What chronic poverty hundreds of Indians suffer! How long Oh Lord, how long?

* * * *

We are allowed to write one letter from prison I do not wish to miss the chance and write to my mother But it is ten to one whether it really reaches its destination

* * * *

Our presence is demanded at the jail office, all of a sudden on a certain day. About fifty prisoners are called for an interview. The jail doctor, who is there, examines each of us and notes down a number of particulars—our height, weight, complexion, marks of identification, etc. We are at a loss to know why we have been singled out like this Have any orders been received from above to take special care of us? Or shall we be let out before our period is over? Let us hope for the best.

X

One has ample opportunities to cultivate the friendship of all sorts of people in jail, especially from among the ordinary class of offenders who are incarcerated for 'civil' and 'criminal' offences as against us, the politicals The number of these people is no doubt small compared with ours The proportion is about one to four. You may rest assured that most of the prisoners of this description are from the peasant class, well-behaved, God-fearing folk, most of them. They have come in here, through the machinations of clever townsmen who league themselves with the policemen and manage to usher these innocent folk into prison. In fact, the very innocence of these villagers, appears to me to be their only guilt.

A few of them are very interesting personalities, too For instance, there is the veteran prisoner of three score and ten, who has practically made the jail his home! He has been here from the age of twenty onwards He has received a life sentence for a couple of murders he committed But somehow no restrictions are imposed upon him now He is allowed to go freely into the town without any guard And he does odd bits of service for the other prisoners, and brings some tobacco or snuff from the town and makes a present of it to his friends No body objects to this The family ties have been broken once for all so far as he is concerned, and he perhaps never thinks of his people at home But one thing All his affection is centred in one creature, the grey cat which never leaves this white haired man even for a moment How I wish I could take a snap of this unique couple!

* * * *

From among the politicals, I have a group of friends who are my work mates, and, as a result, closely associated with me Most of them are young men who have come out of their schools and colleges in order to serve the country They are full of faith and hope, and the promised land is already in sight for these young men They

have seriously begun to discuss plans and programmes for the future I also join the party heartily, although I am not half as optimistic as they

"Delhi would not be the proper capital for a united India"—one of the boys suggests

'We shall shift it on to a more central place, say, Wardha," replies another

"Let be the Headquarters of our province," adds a third

"We shall appoint Mr as the Governor of our province," I put in

"And you shall be the first President of the Indian Republic"—a friend jocularly exclaims looking at me

"Let me first get rid of my dysentery," I retort and silence them

As a matter of fact, my complaint has been getting worse, in spite of the generosity of my 'revolutionary' friend How could he help me? He does not get any milk or ghee himself But his diet is infinitely superior to the Thikki and Pikki On account of him, I have at least managed to keep body and soul together I am advised by everybody to shift to the hospital, or at least to take some 'mixture' I refuse both

Drugging goes against my grain and I do not wish to get into the congested atmosphere of the hospital My condition is grave indeed, and the last examination revealed that I had lost twelve pounds since my arrival

* * * *

After all, the blessed day has arrived and we shall have to bid good bye to our friends and to the District Prison within a few minutes It is no doubt a big wrench I have established loving contacts with so many friends who have to remain here long after I go away My parting with the 'Babu' is especially a very sad affair We have understood each other so well in spite of the differences of language and habits Where is blessed Bengal and where my sweet province of ? They are practically at two corners of our vast continent and yet our hearts have been held together by ties of indissoluble friendship I present all my books to him as a token of my affection and regard He promises to write to me whenever he gets the chance Look at it! He has not cared to write to his own people

A number of friends including the Babu accompany us up to the Jail gate We are, no doubt, loath to leave our comrades behind But the call from the outside world is equally strong— a world full of love and affection and *freedom*

XI

A large number of friends from our previous camp have been waiting outside the gate to receive us

'Please don't do that"—I tell one of the friends who wants to touch my feet

* * * *

So many formalities have to be gone through at the jail office The Jailor hands each of us a certificate by way of a farewell present I am rather proud to receive mine and begin to read it aloud

ORDER

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of Act III of 1864, His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor of in Council doth hereby order P , a foreigner within the meaning of the said act to remove *himself* forthwith from British India by rail to his native place in the State

Age—20 years
Height 5' 6"
Build Thin and tall
Complexion Fair
Marks of identification —a mole left side on nose, a dot scar above left eyebrow, two moles behind left ear

By order of His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor-in-Council.

* * * *

It dawns dimly on us now why we were sent for by the Jailor the other day. This order has dubbed us as 'foreigners' in our own land!—and by whom? It is an effective ban on our entry into British territory. If we just cross the borders of our province, we shall be hauled up and sent to prison again.

But an immediate advantage is that we shall be taken to our homes at Government expense and under police escort. I am anxious to reach home somehow and touch mother's feet.

* * * *

Though we are supposed to be under custody, our friends have managed to take us with them into the town. They know what our urgent need is, and we are escorted to a restaurant which is a veritable paradise now.

We give a good account of ourselves here and do not stand on any niceties either. All sorts of delicacies are chosen in spite of the cautioning of some experienced ex-prisoners All my friends take two doses of coffee. But I am not satisfied and demand a third dose. It is only

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applied to the ocean, stretching out so gloriously before me—verily an Image of Eternity. We spend a good half-hour here, which is more than we had bargained for.

"Good-bye, my friend *Samudraraja!* I shall surely pay a second visit to you as a free son of the soil."

XII

We have to cover nearly a hundred miles by 'bus to-day—a long and tiresome journey no doubt. But we are passing through our camp—a place which has endeared itself to our hearts We shall be very happy to spend a few minutes there

* * * *

Now, the camp is only a mile off, we can get a glimpse of the Ashram from here. We have now come very near the place. I say, do you see that sea of white caps near our camp? I am sure a big crowd has gathered there to greet us It is so good and kind of them to have come all the way from town.

Yes. This is the hallowed place. There is the camp and there the Ashram Don't you see our old friends—the school-master's people, yonder?

now I feel that the *nausea* of Jail life has been shaken off.

* * * *

The town Police Station is our next halting place and to our surprise a group photo has been arranged for us here. I say, the authorities seem to be taking particular care of us! It matters little to us what use they are making of our photographs. After this, our thumb impressions are recorded in the register and at last we are installed safely in the bus intended to carry us.

We have to pass in front of the Jail once again, and we bid our final farewell to those dreary walls wherein we spent our time for six months.

The sea and the harbour are now in sight. Our request for allowing us to spend some time here is readily granted. We had proposed to stay here for two or three days, at least, and to explore these regions But we are still under custody. Thank Heaven! We can just have a passing glance at any rate

Somehow, the sea has always had an irresistible charm for me. To me, it is a symbol of the Creator, who is described as calm and profound, mysterious and terrible, infinite and sublime, attributes which could equally well be

applied to the ocean, stretching out so gloriously before me—verily an Image of Eternity We spend a good half-hour here, which is more than we had bargained for

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Yes This is the hallowed place There is the camp and there the Ashram Don't you see our old friends—the school-master's people, yonder?

But what a disillusionment! There is no one from the town, nor any white cap here. There are only some white clothes hanging to dry.

The 'bus is stopped for us and I run up to the Ashram to pay my respects to the Swamiji. He is sorry that we cannot stay there longer. Woe unto the confounded Foreigners' Act!

At the camp, half-a-dozen kids have joined and sing a welcome song specially composed in our honour. We learn that the school-master's daughter has composed the verses, which are really good. In simple and plain language, our services and sacrifices to the motherland are eulogised. We are called heroes and self-less men. A tone of sincerity runs through the composition and we are very much pleased to find that we have earned a place in the hearts of these little children. We feel more than repaid for our work—which is of course very little.

* * * *

I am glad to find that the vagabond husband has not yet taken cudgels against the poor lady, I mean, the master's daughter.

* * * *

Next we proceed to the town, where a large number of people are waiting to meet us. Our friend, who received us at the jail gate, has made

arrangements for our dinner This is the first homely meal for me after some months, and what a striking contrast to the endless monotony of Thikki, Pikki and Pinda! The ladies of the household know that we are just out from Jail and are very kind and good to us I am reminded of my mother and wish to fly to her on wings, had I any

* * * *

It is evening when we reach our Provincial Headquarters, which is also the Railway Junction where we have to board our train We have got to stay here overnight and catch the train in the morning We take leave of the constables, and go into the town to pay a visit to the Volunteers' Headquarters But here, everything appears to be in a state of chaos The office has been deserted and the Volunteers' camp disbanded Even the library attached to our Headquarters has been taken possession of by the authorities All the workers including our chief have gone the primrose way to their destination—the prison There is no one even to talk to

* * * *

The effects of a strenuous journey have begun to tell on me now I ought to have exercised full control over the palate to day, but I did not

This has added to my troubles. In the excitement and exultation of my release I had forgotten everything about the body. And I must pay the penalty for it, now. There is griping pain in the stomach and the bowels do not move freely. Sleep is out of the question, for, this is the tenth time I am getting up from my bed this night. I sit in the latrine for a quarter of an hour each time. There is no good in doing it either, excepting the heavy strain on the bowels. This time, I have determined not to leave the place, till I have a clean purge. But what is this red substance? My goodness! It is blood. So the dysentery has taken the acutest form.

* * * *

I must board the train now and undertake another long journey. I am already feeling fatigued. I shudder to think of the hell of a night I spent yesterday. Shall I stand this continuous travel? .. Never mind. Let me reach home first. All will be well when I see mother. Maybe, a fresh and glorious chapter of my life shall begin again.

CHAPTER V

BACK HOME

"Mother! Ah Mother! I can't bear the pain. Please get me some hot water to drink The tongue is parched up. I am feeling very thirsty."

I open my eyes and find the hotel boy standing before me. Mother is not in town. She has gone to the village to attend on brother, who is also ill I am now lodging in the hotel. There are no doubt a number of relatives in the city. I do not wish to go to them. They were against my going to the front. And now, I have returned with the stigma of jail life attached to me. Moreover, I am still under surveillance. The police are expected to keep an eye over us on account of the Foreigners' Act. Our people are so panicky, that they would simply shudder at the sight of a 'Khaki Uniform' and if the policeman should come to the house in search of me ! I should much rather suffer in silence, than put others into trouble The inflexible laws of 'Karma' hover like a shadow over us and operate with relentless precision.

As you sow, so shall you reap

II

"Mother, you simply do not understand How many times should I bawl out? Can't you attend to your work later? Please get me a drink, at once"

Mother has now returned She has come with fever on She has practically hurried to my side as soon as she heard from me Brother has not fully recovered, yet But mother has always been partial to me

It is a week since my release My complaint has been getting worse Besides the dysentery, there is some temperature, too This has made matters worse We have, however, shifted to a better dwelling now

The present abode is certainly good There is plenty of air and light You could be your own master, here It is very lucky that the land lady and her people are very good to us This is a great relief Our previous land lord used to be so churlish

III

Things are getting worse That fell disease–dysentery—has been eating me up slowly but steadily If I have to walk to the latrine once, I am tired out And this process has to be

repeated a score of times every day. Every time you lose so much blood and there is mucus too. God knows, where this will lead to. I have been reduced to a skeleton and the body has no stamina, whatever. It is an ordeal, even to sit or stand. Sleep is out of the question. I require mother's help for the least movement.

Food, I cannot relish. I take some *kanji* now and then. Even this tastes bitter. I do not wish to consult any doctor, yet What can the poor man do? The effects of the jail food cannot be removed by his magic touch. If he prescribes any 'mixture' it might make matters worse.

I am quite satisfied with mother's patent decoctions, fomentations and household recipes. It is very rarely that I seek the help of doctors. The last occasion on which I attended the hospital was when my friend had broken his arm. That experience has made me sick of that atmosphere. I would avoid being an in-patient at all costs

IV

"Mother, Ah Mother! Where are you?
You have not made the bed properly, Mother?
These creases hurt me much. And these folds, they get on my nerves. Please put a clean sheet.
There is agonising pain in the stomach. Put

some ice over the abdomen The pain my cease

Mother, the swelling at the knee cap has increased It looks as though it is burning The pain is gradually rising higher and higher It has now reached the waist Ah! It is so severe I simply cannot bear it The whole body appears to be aflame Don't leave my bed, at any cost, Mother! Please apply the mustard poultice once again It gave me so much relief, yesterday"

* * * *

The dysentery and the fever have conspired together and are working havoc upon my frail body Otherwise, how would you explain this new complication—I mean, the swelling at the joints

The joints swell up suddenly and unawares and give intense pain You feel as though that portion of the body is burning and that you are being flayed alive The nerve, the muscle and the tendon are branded, as it were, by some cruel hand And a peculiar thing is that the pain and the swelling appear only at the joints and that they jump from one joint to the other Their upward or downward course cannot be traced For instance, if the swelling disappears at the ankle, it raises its head at the knee-cap and then again at the loins Similarly at the wrist, the elbow and the shoulder This peculiar

disease resembles the myriad-headed Hydra If you chop off one head, another appears in its place at once, as if by the touch of magic It is a problem how to get over the trouble for good

* * * *

There is fever, too The three devils—dysentery, swelling and the fever—appear to have determined to devour me completely I wish they did so at once I could then be free from this agonising, excruciating pain I am walking through fire, now

When the swelling is on, my limbs are benumbed and lifeless and limp I cannot move this way or that, without grave risk to the body For that matter, even to change my clothes is an ordeal Day in and day out, I have to lie on my back like this as though on a rack

In short, I am a living corpse

* * * *

Poor mother is always by my side She has forgotten all about her bodily needs Even her religious rites and punctilious observances have been submerged in the sea of affection and service She has not taken her bath for many days past And no bath means no food The one desire of her heart is that her son should survive

this ordeal—perhaps the most trying in her experience

* * * *

I am gradually losing all control over the body and the limbs I remain stationary on the bed and that only on the back I cannot leave the bed even for 'the primary functions' of the body Poor mother has to attend to each disgusting detail What does it matter to her that I am advanced in years? I am just a child to her. During severe illness, such as this, one is bound to be simple and innocent and unsophisticated like a child, devoid of the sense of shame or decency. I would much rather that this kind of relationship with my mother continues till the end. "So was it when my life began, so is it now I am a man, and so shall it be when I grow old. Or let me die!"

* * * *

The body has become very delicate. It is brittle like glass and taut like a highly-strung musical instrument. I am provoked at the slightest inconvenience and perturbed at the lightest noise I cannot bear the presence of anybody, excepting mother's. For instance, my poor grandmother came the other day to enquire after my health. But I rebuked her severely without

cause I feel sorry now for having been so harsh to her. Why, for that matter, even mother has to swallow many a ill-tempered rebuff This is the reward for all her nursing and tending!

V

It is a month since I returned from jail I have not left my bed all these thirty days, which appear like thirty months to me Still, the disease has not shown any signs of abatement On the contrary, fresh complications have set in I am sure that my days are numbered Mother thinks so too But she does not say it in so many words For me, her very looks and actions speak volumes This earth has ceased to interest me Why bother about it, when I am taking leave of it very soon?

* * * *

To day is a new-moon day and a very inauspicious one as they say. Somehow, my illness has taken a very serious turn and I have given up all hopes of recovery. Anxiety and despair are writ large upon mother's face She is weeping aloud I am not able to open my lips and to pacify her. Some friends are coming in, perhaps to pay their last visit to me. I cannot recognise their faces, much less speak to them. They flit

acrose like shadows and I am lying on my bed like a mute witness at a dumb show All the faculties of the body seem to be slowly disappear ing But behind and above them all a subtle consciousness appears to persist

* * * *

The veil of darkness is sitting heavily on the face of the earth and I feel that a black shadow has been pursuing me closely and shall envelope me in its iron grip ere long —Am I nearing my end ?—Farewell, dear Mother !

* * * *

A state of deep sleep The body sense is completely gone Everything appears hazy and blurred Only the mind and especially a very subtle part of it is working

The whole of the past flits across the memory in kaleiodoscopic quickness and variety Those glorious days of childhood—the days at school—the various games we played—the many dramas that were enacted There is Portia with the lawyer's gown on and admonishing the Jew in the Court hall She is holding forth on the quality of mercy There is Rosalind in masculine attire making love to Orlando and telling him that ' Time gallops withal '—Then there is the College—the First Law of Thermo dynamics—Newton's

Second Law of Motion—Acid—Alkali—Electro statics–Rheostat–the Post-office Box Shakuntala–Macbeth and Hamlet–The Ode on the Intimations of Immortality–Calculus–Differentiation–Integration—Examination— Yes Those infernal examinations—sitting far into the night and turning over the pages with a vengeance till 2 or 3 a m —putting the head under the tap—the cold water bringing the body back to a different world

The mind ceases to work further and the Spirit is carried away into the heavens The earth gradually falls away from me I feel that I am floating joyfully in an unknown and far-away region Now, I am travelling higher and higher in the realm of the stars Everything is serene and blissful There is no pain of any kind, here Time and Space have ceased to be I am sporting in an ocean of everlasting bliss "I shall remain here forever in peace and joy Amen"

VI

"Mother! There is terrible pain here The bowels appear to be squeezing the life out of me Please get the hot-water bottle"

The morning has dawned and the pain with it. I feel that I have come back from a sweet

world of fancy again to this sordid world of men How I wish I had never returned from that joy ful state!

I find mother lying exhausted and helpless by my side She is fatigued by the awful vigil during the night She thought that all was over with me As soon as my sweet voice reaches her ears, she wakes up as from a dream and says, "Thank Heavens! my boy You are still alive The bad day has passed away and all will be well now God has been pleased, after all, to grant you a new lease of life'

* * * *

Mother looks very busy and bright to day She is attending to all my needs with surprising quickness She is keen on enlisting the services of a doctor Enquiries are set on foot immediately and we learn that a physician is residing next door He is called in

"Is it you, old chap? What a pity, I did not know of this a little earlier!' says he and accosts me

He is an old friend and class mate of mine We were such good chums too, at school Both the doctor and the patient are very happy to renew their acquaintance after such a long interval and under such strange circumstances My friend applies himself to his task with energy and

takes personal care of me He is determined to kill the disease completely and to save me from its onslaughts I feel that half my troubles are already over and that Providence has specially sent this personal friend to take care of me.

* * * *

My friend, after studying the history of the case, tells me that there is a special disease called 'Jail Dysentery' mentioned in the medical books and that mine is really a virulent type It has now developed and various complications have set in The swelling at the joints is attributed to rheumatism and the fever is called 'rheumatic fever.'

My friend has been attending on me regularly for the last one week All of us gain some confidence and there is decided improvement in my condition

* * * *

Unfortunately there has been a sudden relapse to day, in spite of my friend's precautions The temperature has shot up rather suddenly Mother is very much upset and wants a more qualified doctor to see my condition A popular physician known to me comes immediately when called and examines me Mother is very much satisfied at his assurance and I feel very grateful to him too!

VII

I greatly rejoice when my engineer friend who has been released, comes to greet me Poor chap! He is so taken aback at my present condition that he decides to take over a good bit of the nursing off my mother's hands. It is a great relief to her after these anxious and weary days. Nursing is a very important need for the patient and all the tenderness and care that you can bestow are needed. And blessed is the sick man who gets the services of such a friend as mine. He anticipates all my needs and difficulties and attends to them unasked. There are a number of odds and ends which may tire out the most patient nurse. He has got to apply hot and cold fomentations; to rub the ointment over the swelling; to clean and make the bed-this is a very difficult job since I cannot be easily moved, adjusting the pillows in various positions—now there are bed-sores on my back which make even lying in bed a torture, and as to massaging, there is no end to it at all

It is very good of him to have agreed to stay with us overnight. This is a great blessing for both mother and me.

How I wish that my engineer friend had also come here a little earlier! I should perhaps have been up and doing by now.

VIII

What place shall I give mother in this triumvirate of my benefactors? Her services beggar all description, and language falters and fails to record the relationship that subsists between a mother and her sick son. Of course, it is but natural that a mother should tend her son on the sick-bed. But is there no limit to self-abnegation and self-immolation? And to what divine heights can a mother's love rise? I have never witnessed affection and devotion and sacrifice such as this. How can I repay her services adequately? It is only a woman that is capable of such infinite patience and endless suffering.

Ah Mother! Do you think I can ever forget the affection you have borne me right through these years? Don't I remember that glorious Pournima night, when I lay on your lap in the temple court-yard and looked up joyfully at the moon, blissfully oblivious of the world without? Only two things mattered to me then—the moon and my mother, mother and the moon. Other things simply did not exist for me—they could not.

I can easily recall to my mind how you would watch me carefully till I turned the end of the lane, while I walked slowly to school.

And then Mother! When father died, how with hair dishevelled you wept and wept as though the end of the world had come all too soon No, Mother! I shan't hurt you by recalling that experience, too sacred for words

I was still a stripling of a boy then, and they took the first opportunity to invest me with the sacred thread Why? To enable me to officiate at those endless ceremonies, coming off every month and every year I was sick of them, Mother! For one thing, they used to make me starve till late in the evening I now really wonder whether all this pleased my father in heaven

But Mother! You used to preserve all the good things that came your way and to present them to your dear little boy How much should those things have cost you in waiting and watching?

What high ambitions you had entertained of me, Mother dear! I bet you would not have been satisfied with anything short of a ministership for your son, when he grew up to man's estate But what a sad disappointment have I been to you that way? And you have borne it all in silence and forgiveness

You need not give up all hope still, Mother! Am I not the bone of your bone and the flesh of

your flesh? In truth, even this body I owe to you And so long as life lasts in me, I shall endeavour to repay the thousand debts I owe you Your name shall be made to resound throughout the globe It shall be flashed across the seven seas and over the nine continents of the earth, nay, it shall be remembered till the sun and moon run their course

What did you say, Mother? No, no I am not joking I am quite in earnest and I mean what I say Please listen to me

Don't you admit that the suffering and sacrifice of a hundred thousand men and women in the cause of our motherland, can never be but a fleeting illusion! "Mere sound and fury signifying nothing" Are you not certain, as much as I am, that we shall be free soon and that the banner of our liberty shall be held aloft for the whole world to envy and admire? Do you not feel with me, that our hallowed land of Bharata varsha shall shine again in all her pristine splendour and glory?

Then does it not follow, Mother! as the night follows the day, that the name of one who bore the humble soldier who fought so valiantly in this great struggle, shall be remembered with gratitude and respect by generations to come?

In spite of these kindnesses and concessions there are a hundred things necessary for managing a household All these mean money How on earth can a poor woman look to these things for months together?

I must have good nourishment, too I need plenty of fruits and milk Cooked food is still taboo for me

Some friends and relatives have been calling on me They are glad that I have passed the danger zone In fact, I have also been evincing some interest in them latterly My temper and irritability are gradually disappearing I am becoming more human

* * * *

One of my good friends is still in jail His mother learns that I am very ill and comes to see me

"Are things very hard, out there in jail?" she asks

"I should say, no It is the food that is intolerable"—I wish to pacify her though I know that the prison in which my friend has been lodged is known for its brutal treatment

"I really wonder how he manages with that food" she continues "Do they get some ghee and milk?"

IX

Thanks to the doctoring of my friend, the nursing of the Engineer, and the careful tending of mother, I am able to open my eyes and to exercise my faculties one by one Of course, I cannot get up from bed or move about, yet It is something like a barren tree showing signs of life after a long period The sap must gradually spread and enliven the whole plant It is a slow process All the tenderness and care that a child requires are needed now But the crisis is over That awful swelling has begun to disappear slowly

* * * *

I am just able to think for myself and to put two and two together I can see that mother has been fighting against odds It is a wonder how she has been managing all these days She is a very brave woman I know that She is a proud woman, too She would not go a begging to our relatives, whose number is legion

* * * *

We are no doubt lucky in many ways There are practically no doctor's bills so far And our land lady is so kind to us and has asked mother not to bother about the rent,

* * * *

In spite of these kindnesses and concessions there are a hundred things necessary for managing a household All these mean money How on earth can a poor woman look to these things for months together?

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"I really wonder how he manages with that food" she continues "Do they get some ghee and milk?"

"You can't dream of those things, Mother"

"God knows how he would bear it all? He has not written to us all these days He has still six months to serve, whereas you have become so bad in such a short time"

Her fears are well founded My friend was brought up in luxury and ease I have seen him spending money freely, without any concern I am sure the hard life in jail will react terribly on him

"By the bye, what food have you been taking now, my boy?" She is anxious to know about my condition

"Only fruits and milk"

"Do you get good cow's milk here? I shall send you some from our house You know we are tending a cow at home"

And she is as good as her word She not only sends the milk regularly every day but comes walking all the way to see how I am progressing All the members of this family are very much attached to me The children have begun to spend most of the time in my company One of the girls has become a favourite of my mother and helps her in the household work.

* * * *

To day I have received a basketful of oranges from my brother who is in the village The fruits are worth their weight in gold They will sustain me for more than a week

X

Two full months have elapsed since I took to bed I feel as though I have been confined to the room for years together I wonder if my exile is to continue *sine die?* How I wish I could shake my limbs a little and move about freely in God's own world?

* * * *

A miracle has taken place to day I got up from bed all by myself and walked to the latrine, with a stick in hand I am so very happy that I can take care of myself And the doctor has allowed me to take rice I have asked mother to prepare that special kind of '*Saru*' It is only she who can bring that appetising flavour into its composition I have also instructed her to cook the vegetable in a particular fashion Chilly and spice should be avoided I had a bitter experience soon after my release from jail So, I must exercise complete control over my palate

* * * *

It is now December and it is very cold at our place. The winter fogs have set in and the mist actually creeps over you My doctor friend has asked me to be very careful and to protect myself against the cold which is very bad for rheumatism The swelling might rear its head again quite unawares I can take more doses of coffee I have been using a pull-over right through the day and I get a Balaclava cap for my head-gear. What is more, I have adorned my feet with a pair of socks and strut about the room with my hands thrust into a pair of gloves. This is perhaps the first time that I have been using gloves. I look so queer in this strange rig-up. And the incongruity is heightened by the thinness of my build.

* * * *

There are two letters for me to-day. One is from our Swamiji at the Ashram He has sent his blessings and wishes speedy recovery. The other is from the prison. My friend the Bengalee Babu has also penned a letter to me.

My dear friend,

I am very glad to receive your kind letter. My heart always longs for a friendly communication. So you can easily imagine how your letter has served my purpose like a draught in the desert.

Though I received your letter a week back, the rules came in the way of my replying at once.

I am glad to hear that you are recovering from your illness, of which I have heard from those two friends who came here for the second time. I am also suffering from the same complaint of rheumatism. It attacked me after the dysentery. Now I am better.

After your leaving the prison I have suffered both mentally and physically. My mental trouble is more than my physical for the present.

I am,
Your beloved friend,
Rakhal.

XI

To-day we are at the end of our resources. Even mother is at her wits' end She has spent the last copper. She did not want to worry me about it when I was ill, lest I should take it to heart. But there is no other go for her now. I cheer her up and tell her that we shall receive help from some quarter very soon Something tells me that we must.

And great indeed was mother's surprise when I received, in less than an hour's time an insured cover addressed to me! I first put the money into

her hands and then read out to her the contents of the letter, which carried its precious gift

"Dear Mr P ,

Yours of the th Many thanks I am sorry I could not meet you on the occasion of your return to your place, as I was then away from Headquarters

I am sorry I have had no occasion to speak to you regarding yourself I am glad I am reminded of my duty and I will try my utmost to discharge it to the best of my ability It is not a question of the condition of our finances but the needs of our workers I have enclosed herewith Rs /- I have no idea as to your requirements But I am sending this as a small contribution, at present Whatever needs you have, please intimate to me Do not stand on niceties I will try my utmost to meet them

I urge you to take not only the month's rest you have asked for, but as much as you need to make you your old self again I trust that it will be possible for me to be out of prison as long as possible so that I may be of some use to our workers and through them to the country

Please write about your health *only*

Yours sincerely,
L "

XII

I am not yet my old self again so far as the body goes But the mind appears to be working with great keenness Though it has no grip over the past as yet, it has sure grasp over the present and the future For instance, I had just written to a good friend of mine regarding my health And as sure as I had expected, there is a letter from that quarter

"My dear P

I have returned from a business tour only yesterday and I learnt all about you from Mr N I am glad that you are fast recovering I request you to make up your mind to spend a couple of weeks at our place I am sure that the climate and environment will certainly hasten recovery You may take your doctor's advice on the point and leave for our village as soon as you can

Yours affectionately,

So, there are such good souls in this world They are indeed the salt of the earth! It is on account of such folk that our old globe still keeps going and is worth living in!

* * * *

I pack up my belongings and march off to my friend's place the very next day without further ado My doctor friend had suggested that a change to another place would do me immense good And here is a golden opportunity which has come seeking me!

* * * *

I wish to pay a visit to a co worker of mine, staying in a village near by He was jailed twice and it was he who had conveyed a message of good cheer to me from the Bengalee Babu I learn from him that the conditions in our jail had changed considerably after our first visit So many prisoners were removed to distant places in the north and heavy restrictions were imposed on those still remaining I am glad that I have escaped the humiliation

As for my friend, his affairs at home are very bad His parents had asked him to get himself purified after his return, and they desire that he should not court jail again But he had strongly protested and had gone away a second time thus incurring their displeasure But this time, his father was seriously ill and he had undergone the purification ceremony, just to be able to attend on his father I stay with this friend for a couple of days His father passes

away I accompany my friend to the place of cremation and we return home late in the evening

XIII

There is a letter waiting for me at my host's place My uncle is very ill and in a precarious condition His people desire that I should go and see him at once And I pack up my things to go to my uncle's place

* * * *

On my way I am greeted by name at a way-side station by a crazy looking sort of man His face is rather familiar to me But I cannot recognise him at once He puts me at ease by giving out his credentials He was one of my co workers at camp hardly three months ago And what an inexplicable change has taken place in his form and features, face and limbs? He appears to be a different man altogether While we were working together, he was bright and cheerful and such a smart, decent-looking fellow

* * * *

His story is heart-rending His father has disinherited him for having taken active part in the campaign Moreover, he was asked to marry a girl against his wish and he had stoutly refused

the proposal. Before joining the fight he had been employed as a schoolmaster. He would not be given that job again as he had returned from jail. He was therefore knocking about in the streets in sheer despair To all appearances he is like a mad man now

"Shall I court arrest again?" he asks me.

"No, not in this condition. You must first get control over your mind before you do that," I tell him and the train steams off.

XIV

Mother and I hurry up to my uncle's place. It is a wearisome journey and we have to traverse the hottest part of the country.

When we reach home, we are greeted with cries and sobs and wails It is clear that all is over and that we have just missed the final scene The uncle had reached his journey's end, rather too soon He had not yet completed forty and he was such a strong and robust person, too

It is rather heart-rending to witness the tragedy of a big family whose sole supporter has gone away for ever, leaving a trail of sorrow and misery and desolation behind I accompany the

other members back to their native village, where a never-ending round of obsequies and ceremonies has to be gone through.

What funny people we are? We pay more attention to the dead than to the living!

XV

We reach home rather weary and depressed after the trying experiences of the last few days. I had, in the meanwhile, sent a letter to my employers intimating my desire to resume work. I have not yet recoverd my normal health, nor can I engage myself in any sustained work—either physical or mental. And it is really doubtful whether I shall ever regain my original physique at all. In fact, I am feeling that I am a changed man altogether.

* * * *

There has been some delay in my getting a communication from the employers. And when I acually get one, I receive a rude shock. I am told that there is no place for me now. I was therefore let loose to take care of myself.

XVI

When I break the unfortunate news to mother, she is taken aback and cannot speak for some time. Then she turns round and says,

"So you have attained full Swaraj now?"

"Yes, mother There is Swaraj in my heart, already. Let the other Swaraj come when it does. Now there is no hurry for it so far as I am concerned"

"Theorising is all very good, my boy. But we have got to face the reality now."

Why? We have been facing it for months together. And hundreds of thousands in our country have been facing it for years on end. We open our eyes only when the shoe pinches us. That is all.

* * * *

I have now joined the vast army of the unemployed who have been stalking our land. I am busy myself turning over the advertisement columns of newspapers. More than a score of applications have been sent to various places—desirable and otherwise. As the saying goes one must throw stones at the mango till it falls Fall it must. But when and how?

* * * *

I have been knocking about in the hot sun in search of a job and that in my present state of health But the mango has not yet fallen. Of course, if I join the fight all this worry will cease.

But I will be arrested at once without being able to turn out any work And I have practically come out of a death-bed and the jail is sure to eat me up completely this time How about my mother, who has been so happy at my deliverance? Shall I leave her in the lurch again?

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I feel that I have been moving about in a strange, an unsympathetic and unimaginative world Everyone I come across is engrossed with his own endless desires and worries They are loath to move out of their ego centric world of I, me and mine I have nothing in common with such people, nor can I find any pleasure in their company

Books do not interest me now, especially those works of fiction, with their endless love-making and their endless squabbles Even the books on religion and philosophy do not attract me, for, I am now in dire grips with life itself and I am out to solve the problem for myself The self is raised by the 'Self' says the Lord

Can art come to my aid? Art, in vulgar hands, and subserving commercial ends in the modern world, has fallen into disrepute But the highest Art may well be the aim of man's

We lay out a beautiful park with the pictures There are various plants and flower-beds displayed artistically in our park with a view to symmetry and beauty Birds with delightful plumage are made to perch on the twigs And we put up a pleasant fountain, too, in the middle of the park

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The spinning wheel is lying in a corner of my room, as though looking askance at me I try to work it for some time but give it up soon as I am easily fatigued I have not yet acquired the necessary physical energy to work it

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An essay competition has been announced in the papers Why should I not try my luck at it? It will keep me engaged for some days at least

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My Bengalee friend has sent me a letter through one of the released prisoners And there are two good pictures too They are specially painted by him for me The poor chap will be very sorry when next he hears about my present state of affairs

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A palmist came to our house the other day Mother was anxious to know how I stood So

endeavour, if the aspirant but possess the requisite urge and qualification to pursue the ideal Here is what Nalini Kanta Gupta, speaking about Sri Aurobindo Ghose says on the relation of Art and spirituality, holding up to our attention a great ideal

"If art is meant to express the soul of things and since the true soul of things is the divine element in them, then certainly spirituality, the discipline of coming in conscious contact with the Spirit, the Divine, must be accorded the regal seat in the hierarchy of the arts Also, spirituality is the greatest, and the most difficult of the arts, for it is the art of life To make of life a perfect work of beauty, pure in its lines, faultless in its rhythm, replete with strength, iridescent with light, vibrant with delight—an embodiment of the Divine, in a word—is the highest ideal of spirituality Viewed as such, spirituality—the spirituality that Sri Aurobindo practises—is the *ne plus ultra* of artistic creation"

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To day, my younger brother is busy with his hobby He has collected a large number of designs which appear on match boxes and he is going to exhibit them at his school anniversary I help him in arranging his collection properly

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A palmist came to our house the other day. Mother was anxious to know how I stood. So

I was asked to show him my palm. He read the past with remarkable accuracy, and the prediction regarding the future should also be correct And mother was so overjoyed when he said so many good things about me He was handsomely rewarded It was an auspicious day and the Brahmin got a good meal too

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A full year has gone by since the story began Mother earth has begun to spin again round the sun And what changes have been wrought in many a life during the short interval! In truth, I feel that I have completed one life on this planet and that I am ready to begin another anew. I am a young man, still on the threshold of life; a hundred desires of the heart are yet clamouring for expression; and a whole future is looking at me in blank despair!

EPILOGUE

"Here doth the narrative end, my gentle friend."

"What, so abruptly and so soon?"

"Yes. But I have told you whatever need be told. In fact, I have laid bare my soul unto you. I have ripped open my heart and allowed you free access into its innermost recesses. I have taken you round its chambers and ante-chambers. What more could I do for you?"

"That I admit. But you have ended the story in the midst of suffering and sorrow"

"Quite true. But how could I help it? Suffering and sacrifice are at the very basis of Life. They are the only weapons in our present fight, which is still going on. You are sure to hear many a tale, yet, tales full of sorrow and misery and cross-bearing They shall be more intensely tragic and more vividly pathetic They shall be told in a dozen languages and be perhaps infinitely more beautiful too, in the telling."

"I understand, my friend. But let yours be 'a fitting prelude to the swelling act of an imperial theme.' Good-bye."

"No, no. You cannot run away like that. It is not the Indian way to send you empty-handed after having bored you with my story 'Please wait, Yes, my friend Mother is willing to accompany us So you must get ready for a pilgrimage round my country"

"Papa " That is my little girl Shantha looking askance at me

"Yes, my darling. You shall also go with us"

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This is my beautiful land, my friend; the land of sandal and gold, of coffee and cardamom. Have you seen such beautiful edifices before? Aren't they perfect poems wrought in stone? No, no Please take off your shoes here. How dare you enter the Divine Presence with your foot-wear on?

"We offer our humble salutations at your lotus feet, Thou Lord of the three worlds! Please make our country free, completely free."

Hush! Do you think you can describe in words, unearthly beauty such as this?

It is here, my friend, that the Artist and the Engineer, the human and the divine have joined hands to picture the 'Infinite' and have reached their goal—Liberation.

Come along, my friend Yes You are right The speech here is music and music is a sweet spell of devotion in praise of the Lord How wonderfully they play on that instrument They 'question' the string ever so mildly and lo! it breaks forth into a heavenly rhapsody Your heart responds in unison and the soul is carried away into a far-off land

Please come this way Have you seen such a fairy-land of fountains lighted up in variegated colours and so enchanting to look at? And this mighty cataract? Do you see those four falls full of terror and beauty descending in unending streams of silver? Here it seems as though the wood nymph is offering oblations at the feet of the Almighty? Now behold the rainbow spanning the valley and producing a magical effect all round!

It is here my friend that man finds himself playing for ever on the bosom of the Infinite, quite oblivious of what happens around him

We shan't tarry here any longer There is much more to see This is the famous hill of the red earth I was telling you about You can see the wonderful ropeway at work, yonder It is three miles long and carries down the hill an unending supply of iron ore They say that there are a hundred million tons of ferrous ore here,

ready for being smelted How generous is mother earth, and how greedy are we—her children?

Come up, please Can you recognise that fragrance being wafted in the air? Do you see that vast sheet of white flowers spreading beautifully over those green plants? These are the well known coffee plantations You can see them right across our path up the hill

We shall rest here, awhile This is the favourite summer residence of our Ruler And, what a fine taste he has displayed! Look at this sylvan glide, this nice fountain springing up from the hill top and these wonderful flower-beds

My God! I am afraid we have trespassed into a veritable paradise

'Why should we not remain here happily for ever, Papa?" exclaims my little girl

"Yes, my dear We shall not go back to those plains again It is so calm and peaceful and lovely here"

But alas! Our country?

VANDE MATARAM